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Acculturation and Work Culture: Lived Experiences of Foreign Hospitality Workers in Finland

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Abstract

This thesis looks into the lived experiences of foreign workers in the Finnish hospitality sector, focusing on how both cultural and structural factors shape their sense of integration, identity, and satisfaction with their jobs. As the industry becomes more dependent on migrant labor, it also continues to face persistent issues, such as language difficulties, social isolation, and heavy work demands that do not seem to go away easily. The goal of this study was to understand how these foreign workers deal with such challenges in their daily lives, and what their stories might say about how acculturation plays out in the Finnish workplace.

The framework for this study is mainly built on Berry's (1997) ideas about acculturation and Hofstede's (2010) work on cultural dimensions. The approach was interpretive and phenomenological, with the analysis shaped through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants from five different national backgrounds all working in Finland's hospitality field.

Findings revealed that although many participants aimed to integrate, their efforts were often held back by informal language rules, misunderstandings rooted in culture, and unfair or unclear dynamics in the workplace. The differences between collectivist and individualist values seemed to play a big role in how workers felt about their relationships and expectations on the job. Some individuals adjusted quite well and even felt comfortable within Finnish norms, but others found themselves dealing with emotional distance and a feeling of being pushed to the side. Basic workplace issues, such as unstable hours, low wages and no much room for growth, also had a big influence on how people thought about their future. Several were unsure whether they would stay in the industry or even remain in the country.

The study concludes that improving the retention and well-being of foreign hospitality workers in Finland requires more than raising salaries. It calls for a cultural shift in how inclusion is enacted in everyday workplace interactions: employers must recognise that integration is a two-way process, foreign workers can adapt, but they also need to feel valued, supported, and included.

KEYWORDS: Acculturation, Cultural Dimensions, Migrant Workers, Interpretive Phenomenology, **Hospitality industry**

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose of the study

The movement of people across borders has increased in all parts of the world as a result of globalisation (Joppe, 2012, p. 662), leading to more culturally plural nations (Berry, 1997, p. 8). Relocating to a new country is a profound and transformative journey loaded with excitement, uncertainty, and new opportunities. Immigrants, perhaps driven by aspirations for a better life, embark on this path, leaving their familiar surroundings and cultural contexts behind. As people cross geographical borders, they simultaneously cross-cultural frontiers, stepping into a world where norms, values, and behaviours may differ significantly from their own.

The movement of people across borders is also often driven by employment opportunities, and a foreign workforce is seen as a desirable option in industries suffering from labour shortage (International Labour Organization, 2021, p. 16). The hospitality industry is one of them; globally known as an industry suffering from high employee turnover and difficulties in employee retention, it is also seen as the embodiment of diversity, embracing individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Lefrid et al., 2022, p. 1). In addition to this, the hospitality industry is seen as an entryway for immigrants into the destination work market (Devine et al., 2007, p. 335; Lefrid et al., 2022, p. 1) providing valuable work experience and even possibilities for professional development.

Nevertheless, navigating cultural differences can be difficult for an individual, and studies have shown that the inability to adjust and adapt to the new culture can have serious consequences that can eventually lead to the immigrant immigrating back to their familiar settings and cultural norms (Berry et al., 2011, p. 324). In addition to this, the inability to adjust is known to negatively impact the individual's mental health, as well as physical health (Schwartz et al., 2010, pp. 238, 243).

To harness the potential of the foreign workforce and revitalise industries experiencing labour shortages, it could be argued that it is crucial to understand and adapt to their cultural differences, even when they involve values and norms that may differ from our own. The hospitality industry might have a positive image when accepting a culturally diverse workforce, however, it is

unfortunately also known to suffer from poor leadership, low wages, and harsh working conditions (Lefrid et al., 2022, pp. 1–2).

Through a phenomenological approach, this thesis aims to explore the lived experiences of foreign hospitality workers in Finland by utilising John W. Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies and cultural dimension theory by Geert Hofstede (2010). In this context, the study seeks to answer the question**: "How do cultural differences influence the acculturation process and adaptation of foreign hospitality workers to Finnish work culture?"**. By utilising Berry's acculturation strategies, it will be explored how the migrant workers are adapting and adjusting to the Finnish culture, or if perhaps they are facing acculturation stress, which has led them to feel unwelcome and isolated, making them doubt their future in the Finnish labour market. Additionally, Hofstede's cultural dimension theory will be used to provide insights into the nature of Finnish culture, highlighting characteristics that may pose challenges for newcomers.

By understanding Berry's acculturation strategies, we can gain valuable insights into how foreign workers in Finland adjust to a new cultural environment and how the surrounding society influences their integration. The strategies can help explain the diverse adaptation experience of immigrants. Additionally, Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide a useful framework for comparing cultural differences, particularly in the workplace. By identifying key cultural differences, we could better identify potential areas of conflict and develop strategies to improve workplace integration. This study aims to provide insights for employers and support organizations to enhance integration strategies and job satisfaction among foreign hospitality workers in Finland, hopefully contributing to higher retention rates. To build on this foundation, the next chapter will review previous research on the experience of foreign hospitality workers, highlighting key findings and gaps in the literature.

1.2. Previous research

While looking for previous research on the experience of foreign hospitality workers, I noticed that the topic has been widely studied in many parts of the world, however from different perspectives; In this chapter, I will broadly present three research articles that all study migrant workers in hospitality, along with briefly mentioning other similar research. The first research from Devine, Baum, Hearns and Devine (2007) focused on cultural diversity in Northern Ireland's hospitality

setting and they solely interviewed migrant hospitality workers, pointing out issues like lack of training and cultural differences. The second research article by Zopiatis, Constanti and Theocharous (2014) also interviewed local employees and managers, in addition to the migrant workers. Their study was done in Cyprus and highlighted the need for diversity management plans and implementation. The third research article by Lefrid, Torres and Okumus (2022) focuses more on the acculturation process and the balancing act between native and host cultures among migrant workers in the U.S., highlighting the positive role of employers in facilitating cultural integration and the importance of maintaining cultural identity.

The article "Cultural Diversity in Hospitality Work: the Northern Ireland Experience" by Devine et al. (2007) explores the international employees' experiences in hotels in Northern Ireland, and it was conducted using questionnaires and focus groups involving migrant workers across nine hotels. In the article, Devine et al. (2007, p. 336) identified the hospitality sector as having one of the highest employee turnover rates and also pointed out challenges in recruitment and retention within the industry. Their study explored the characteristics, experiences, and perceptions of migrant workers in Northern Ireland, and specifically focused on examining the challenges these workers were facing in terms of their working conditions, assimilation into the workplace and broader communities, and their future perspectives in Northern Ireland (Devine et al., 2007, pp. 336–337). The study found that most of the migrants immigrated to Northern Ireland from other EU countries, as well as from outside of the EU, in hopes of better economic opportunities and planned to stay there for short- to medium-term periods (Devine et al., 2007, pp. 337–339). The migrant workers in this study were mainly young and had a high level of education, although not necessarily from the hospitality industry (Devine et al., 2007, p. 339).

The results of Devine et al. (2007) research were somewhat mixed, as while some expressed their concerns and dissatisfaction towards their treatment, many also expressed satisfaction and gratefulness, citing a friendly working environment and opportunities the experience provided (Devine et al., 2007, p. 344). The challenges that the workers were mentioned to have, correlate to prevailing characteristics of the global hospitality industry (which will be presented in the following chapters): It was noted that the migrant workers received hardly any training from their employers during their employment, and in some cases, the workers were paying for essential courses by themselves (Devine et al., 2007, p. 339). This correlates to how migrant workers are

often seen as temporary solutions to seasonal labour shortages and not valued as long-term human capital, which was something that the migrant workers themselves raised as an issue (Devine et al., 2007, pp. 346–347). In addition to this, according to the results, the migrant workers did not receive proper training on their arrival, but they had to learn their work tasks from other workers (Devine et al., 2007, p. 339). The lack of language training was also highlighted, while simultaneously mentioning that communication is one of the biggest obstacles in the integration of migrant workers (Devine et al., 2007, p. 344).

This study not only highlighted the importance of the role of migrant workers in addressing Northern Ireland's labour shortage in the hospitality sector, but it also highlighted the need for improved management and integration strategies for the retention of migrant workers (Devine et al., 2007, p. 333). They suggest that migrant workers should receive better integration into the local culture (especially language), as they believe it would alleviate the stress caused by cultural differences (Devine et al., 2007, p. 347). In addition to this, Devine et al., (2007, p. 347) further highlight the importance of providing cultural training to the domestic staff as well.

Another study done on migrant workers focused on Cyprus, and it was conducted in 2013 by Zopiatis, Constanti and Theocharous (2014). This research studied three hospitality stakeholders: management, migrant employees, and local employees, and explored four key themes: The motivations for the industry's employment of migrant workers and the difficulties in managing a diverse team, the reason migrant workers choose Cyprus for labour migration, the existing dynamics of intercultural interactions faced by migrant workers (externally and internally in the organization), and the influence of migrant workers on the quality and effectiveness of service delivery (Zopiatis et al., 2014, pp. 113–114). This research was done using a qualitative approach, including semi-structured interviews conducted with 33 individuals from 11 different hospitality establishments (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 114). The participants were selected through random sampling, whereas the establishments were pre-selected based on having a larger number of migrant workers (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 114). Most of the interviewees were from Cyprus, however, the portion of the migrant workers consisted of 11 individuals originating from the EU and outside of the EU.

Zopiatis et al. (2014, pp. 114–115) found that what motivates employers to hire foreign labour centres around the lack of interest from locals to fill these jobs, economic efficiency and seasonal

demand. However, employers also identified that there are challenges that come with a migrant workforce, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and the loss of the authentic Cypriot tourist experience, which comes when most of the workforce is not local (Zopiatis et al., 2014, pp. 115–118). The migrant workers' reason for immigrating to Cyprus was found to be mainly economic, however, their experiences as migrant workers were different to those found by Devine et al. (2007) in Northern Ireland: mainly positive. Most of the migrant and local workers had positive experiences, citing friendships built between foreigners and locals, however, some acknowledged that they were aware of the exploitation of migrant workers happening in Cyprus but claimed to never have experienced it themselves (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 116). Interestingly, it is noted that in Cyprus the need for migrant workers is acknowledged, which is why exploitation only happens on rare occasions and is frowned upon (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 117). While the study did not quote any negative feedback relating to cultural differences or integration into the workplace from the employees, Zopiatis et al. (2014, pp. 118–120) fear that the interviewees might not have been completely honest, regardless of confidentiality. They further emphasise that most of the interviewees were Eastern European women working in highly male-dominated management, fearing that their “overly positive” responses did not reflect their true experiences, and thus advise to interpret the results by acknowledging this potential limitation (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 119). This emphasises the sensitivity of the topic and is something that should be considered in future research.

However, the study did reveal concerns from the employers and local workers when it came to the authenticity of the Cypriot tourist experience, which is argued to be vanishing along with the increased migrant labour (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 117). Managers and local workers stated that they received complaints about the lack of language or cultural knowledge of the migrant workers, which negatively affected service delivery (Zopiatis et al., 2014, pp. 117–118). The local workers also raised concerns about language skills, stating that they experienced difficulties in communicating with foreign staff (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 116). In addition to this, it was discovered that a lot of the migrant workers were highly educated, but received very few opportunities for promotion (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 115).

Overall, this study revealed that despite recognising the benefits of a diverse workforce, companies in Cyprus seemed to struggle to implement, or even articulate, effective diversity management

strategies. There seemed to be awareness of the need for cultural and language training, yet specifics on how (or who) would provide this remained elusive (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 118).

Another study conducted by Mohammed Lefrid, Edwin N. Torres and Fevzi Okumus (2022) focused on acculturation and familism, and more specifically explored the complicated dynamics of acculturation, familism, job satisfaction, and organisational attachment among immigrant workers in the U.S. hospitality industry. They performed a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews of 19 hospitality workers, following an inductive and deductive approach, to investigate how foreign hospitality workers navigate their lives and cultural identities in two different cultures and how this affects their work-life (Lefrid et al., 2022, p. 4). The interviewees consisted of a balance between females and males, and they originated mainly from Central/South America and the Middle East/North Africa, however, there were individuals from the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Lefrid et al., 2022, p. 4). The statistics also showed, however, that most were born in the U.S. or had spent over 10 years in the country.

Their results showed that most foreign hospitality workers sought to maintain a balance between their native country and America, by celebrating their cultural holidays and practising their cultural norms (such as religion, dance, and language) while learning the local language and also celebrating the local holidays (Lefrid et al., 2022, pp. 5–6). This indicated that the immigrants are actively engaging in acculturation and shared positive results in integrating aspects of both cultures into their lives. The foreign workers also maintained strong ties with other immigrants from their own culture, to preserve their traditions, which is a central theme in familism (Lefrid et al., 2022, p. 2).

Interestingly, the results underscored that the foreign workers held their employer and their acceptance of diverse cultural backgrounds in high regard, emphasising the positive role the employer has on the well-being of a foreign worker (Lefrid et al., 2022, pp. 6–7). They emphasised that their cultural values were respected in their workplace, and even though their employers did not partake in the workers' cultural holidays or rituals, they made accommodations to ensure the workers felt at ease maintaining their cultural values (Lefrid et al., 2022, p. 7).

In conclusion, Lefrid et al. (2022) suggested that a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals select their acculturation path, drawing from Berry's acculturation model, would provide valuable insights into the factors shaping acculturation. These factors incorporate

acculturative stress, perceptions of workplace discrimination, and the equilibrium between work and personal life. This means that if we better understand how people choose their way of adapting to a new culture, it can give us useful insights into the things that influence this process (Lefrid et al., 2022, p. 7).

While previous studies on foreign hospitality workers highlight recurring challenges, particularly language barriers and workplace integration, they have primarily focused on external workplace policies, rather than individual experiences. While cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings, structured workplace policies have been shown to improve intercultural relations (Grobelna, 2015, pp. 105–106). However, existing research does not sufficiently explore these dynamics within Finland's hospitality sector, especially from the perspective of foreign workers (Larja & Peltonen, 2023, p. 32). Furthermore, most studies employ traditional qualitative methods, whereas this research applies interpretive phenomenology, allowing a deeper exploration of how foreign workers perceive and interpret their adaptation experiences(Kirillova, 2018, p. 3327; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1054). This focus addresses a key gap in the literature by centring on workers' subjective experiences rather than external workplace policies alone. Given Finland's increasing reliance on foreign workers to address labour shortages, a better understanding of their lived experiences is crucial for developing more effective integration strategies (Barona, 2024; MaRa, 2023).

Building on these insights, the next chapter outlines the methodology used in this study to explore the unique experience of foreign hospitality workers in Finland.

1.3. Methodology

For this research, my goal was to extensively explore the *experiences* of migrant workers. I prioritised gaining a profound understanding of their lived experiences rather than focusing on collecting a large amount of numerical quantitative data. Phenomenology was thus a natural choice as it is both a philosophical stance and a research method that offers a unique perspective for exploring the complexities of human experiences (Sharma & Altinay, 2012, p. 947; Stierand & Dörfler, 2012, p. 947), and it is commonly referred to as the "study of lived experience"(Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1054).

Phenomenology has two main orientations: *descriptive* and *Interpretive* phenomenology (Kirillova, 2018, p. 3328). Descriptive phenomenology, pioneered by Edmund Husserl, tries to

understand experiences by using methods like "bracketing". This means setting aside questions about why things happen or the reasons behind conscious experiences (Gill, 2014, p. 119; Kirillova, 2018, p. 3328). On the other hand, interpretive phenomenology, introduced by Martin Heidegger, emphasises interpretation and understanding, rejecting bracketing and actively exploring questions related to the cause or explanation for conscious experience (Cerbone, 2014, p. 44). Unlike Husserl's approach, Heidegger believes that pre-existing understanding shapes our experiences, and prior knowledge plays a fundamental role in interpretation (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, pp. 1064–1068).

When deciding between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology for this research, I considered my background and perspectives: having firsthand experience in the hospitality industry in Finland, I understand its nature and can imagine the challenges foreigners might encounter while adapting to the Finnish work culture within the service sector. Additionally, being from a migrant family and having moved to Finland at a young age, my bicultural identity allows me to empathise with cultural differences. Moreover, working in the Global Mobility Industry, I am closely involved with labour migration, sparking my interest in society's role in accepting migrant workers and in formulating strategies to retain them. In Interpretive phenomenology, the researcher's goal is to understand and interpret the meaning of lived experiences from the perspective of those undergoing them (Gill, 2014, p. 120). Drawing on my firsthand experiences in the hospitality industry and my connections to migration and foreign labour, I have a rich context for exploring and interpreting the challenges faced by foreign workers in adapting to Finnish work culture. Additionally, I chose Interpretive phenomenology because I wanted to include my perspectives and experiences in the interpretation, which would be necessary as opposed to descriptive phenomenology, where such inclusion is typically excluded (Gill, 2014, pp. 119–120).

The data for this research was gathered between November – December 2024 through semi-structured interviews, and it was analysed using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). While IPA is mainly used in psychology, it has also been utilised in social sciences and its core lies in closely examining individual experiences, what those experiences mean to them and how they understand them (Smith, 2011, p. 9). A more detailed description of the data gathering process will be explained in Chapter 4.5 Data Gathering and Analysis.

1.4. Structure of the study

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, each building on the previous, to explore how cultural differences influence the acculturation and work experiences of foreign hospitality workers in Finland.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic and explains why the research is relevant. It presents the research question and the aim of the study. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework and key concepts used in this study. This includes Berry's acculturation strategies, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, along with previous research on foreign hospitality workers' experiences in the workplace. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodological approach and explains why I chose Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and describes the research philosophy behind it. Chapter 4 describes the research process in more detail, including how participants were recruited, how the data were collected and analysed. Additionally, I will explain what steps were taken to protect anonymity in my research. Chapter 5 presents the findings from the interviews, organised into main themes that reflect the participants' experiences of language, communication, cultural expectations, and belonging. Chapter 6 connects the participants' narratives to theoretical concepts such as acculturative stress, communication style, and integration strategies, highlighting how their lived experiences reflect or challenge existing research. Chapter 7 outlines the limitations of the study. It reflects on the methodological and practical constraints, such as the sample size, language barriers and my own positionality. Finally, chapter 8 concludes the thesis by summarizing the main insights, discussing their practical implications and offering suggestions for future research. The list ends with a thorough bibliography.

2. THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

2.1. Characteristics of the Industry Globally

The hospitality industry is notoriously known for having high turnover rates of employees (Baum, 2007, p. 1389). This is further supported by Kong et al. (2018, p. 2179), who note that the sector has long struggled with low job satisfaction and high turnover, especially among frontline workers. This comes from the perception of the industry as being a "low-skilled" industry offering low pay, undesirable working hours associated with social stigma, and the lack of formal training or qualifications (Deery, 2002; Deery & Shaw, 1999 as cited in Duncan et al., 2013, p. 2). Moreover, particularly in the more developed countries (Baum, 2008, p. 83), the hospitality industry is hardly ever viewed as a long-term career (unless it is in a managerial position), but is rather viewed as a temporary job (Baum, 2007, p. 1390). Despite being labelled as a "low-skilled" occupation, Warhurst and Nickson (2007, pp. 110–114) have highlighted that in this type of service industry, so-called "soft skills" are often in higher demand than technical skills. This is because the job involves extensive interaction with people, needing the ability to establish connections, create a welcoming atmosphere and demonstrate empathy towards others, in other words, it requires the employees to be hospitable (Duncan et al., 2013, p. 3; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007, p. 105).

Hospitality work has also been labelled precarious work by Robinson et al. (2019, p. 1009), highlighting that the current model of tourism (which includes hospitality) often intensifies social and economic inequalities while providing unstable employment conditions. Precarious work here is any work that consists of a high level of insecurity and instability (financial), which can lead to declining mental or physical health (Robinson et al., 2019, p. 1011). They further propose a reorientation towards prioritising the well-being of people, particularly those working in the tourism sector, as a crucial aspect of sustainable tourism development (Robinson et al., 2019, p. 1009). In Robinson's earlier work (2013) he goes as far as describing the tourism & hospitality industry as "present-day slavery", stating that: "a significant proportion of the world's slaves are directly engaged in hospitality services, often in consort with tourism – in economically underdeveloped, developing as well as developed countries" (Robinson, 2013, p. 95). Whereas referring to the hospitality industry as containing aspects of present-day slavery is a bit stark, it should be noted that the industry has unfortunately been responsible for the exploitation of minority groups, especially migrant workers (Anderson, 2010, p. 2000).

2.2. The role of migrant workers in Hospitality and labour shortage

Labour shortage is a globally addressed problem affecting many industries worldwide (Baum et al., 2007, p. 230; Taylor & Finley, 2010, p. 682). Researchers have identified that countries suffering from labour shortages are commonly developed, high-income countries and the labour shortage is caused by many factors, including an ageing population, low birth rates (Taylor & Finley, 2010, p. 682) and globalisation (Baum et al., 2007, p. 230). A widely addressed opinion is that foreign workers are needed in the industry to fill the positions not wanted by the locals (Christensen-Hughes, 1992, p. 80; Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 111), which are usually low-skilled positions, such as those in the hospitality industry (Joppe, 2012, p. 664). When examining the hospitality industry through the lens of foreign labour, it becomes evident that diversity is a defining characteristic, with work rarely being performed by culturally homogenous groups (Duncan et al., 2013, p. 3).

Several hospitality establishments have implemented recruitment strategies centred on the use of migrant labour in recent years, (Zopiatis et al., 2014, p. 112) however, it is important to note that the mobility of hospitality workers has been occurring for several decades already, as documented by Christensen-Huges in the 90s (1992, p. 78). Migrant workers are valued in the hospitality industry due to their low cost and flexibility, which are seen as vital characteristics in an industry whose demand for workforce fluctuates dramatically due to its seasonality (Joppe, 2012, p. 665). Furthermore, hospitality organisations are also known to hire culturally diverse staff to cater for their culturally diverse clientele (Richard, 2000, as cited in Manoharan et al., 2021, p. 1384). This practice is particularly common in hotels and restaurants, where the guest and customer base exhibits significant cultural diversity and a multitude of languages spoken, meaning that maintaining a culturally diverse staff can be perceived as an advantage (Grobelna, 2015, pp. 102–103). Furthermore, authors such as Roberge and van Dick (2010, p. 297) identified that culturally diverse teams have demonstrated an increase in creativity, problem-solving and innovation.

However, while maintaining a culturally diverse workforce can enhance interactions with international guests and customers, it is important to acknowledge that it can also introduce challenges when cultural differences potentially give rise to misunderstandings – in both external and internal interactions (Alaa-Eldeen et al., 2022, p. 246; Grobelna, 2015, pp. 103–104). Moreover, it was also noted by Roberge and van Dick (2010, pp. 295–297) that culturally diverse

groups commonly encounter challenges such as heightened conflict, diminished group performance, and decreased group cohesiveness, if not properly managed. One of the main challenges in a culturally diverse workforce is often thought to be language barriers, however, it has been identified that it is not only language barriers that can cause misunderstandings but also cultural differences that are shaped by religion, history and politics (Grobelna, 2015, pp. 102–103). Similar observations were made by Sizoo et al. (2010, p. 10), where they identified that the clashing of cultural norms and values can result in conflicts. An important statement was made by Duncan et al. (2013, p. 10) when discussing the impacts a diverse workforce in hospitality can have, stating that: "- they can also be the cause of issues if they are seen not to integrate into a workplace, community or wider host society.".

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the use of migrant workers in the hospitality industry has been studied, and those studies often yield results relating to poor diversity management, where workers have been left to fend for their own in a completely new environment. The effects of cultural changes and acculturation stress will be examined in more detail in the following chapters; however, it is already evident at this stage that poor diversity management frequently contributes to high employee turnover in the hospitality industry (Gehrels & Suleri, 2016, p. 63).

From the perspective of sustainable human resource management, as outlined by Gehrels and Suleri (2016, p. 63), diversity and inclusion (D&I) are vital parts of today's world, where the viability of the hospitality industry relies heavily on its D&I policies. In the context of contemporary business practices, diversity and inclusion are key factors in growing and lasting success (Gehrels and Suleri, 2016). To make the most of diversity and avoid problems from not managing it well, organisations should take active steps to create a workplace that values diversity and inclusiveness (Baum, 2018, p. 881). Not only is it financially more sustainable to focus on retaining employees (Ghani et al., 2022, pp. 2–3) rather than constantly recruiting them, it is also noted that insufficiently addressing diversity and inclusion can lead to an unfavourable perception of the organisation among stakeholders, ultimately causing a downturn in business (Dilling, 2011, p. 29).

2.3. Finland's Hospitality Industry

2.3.1. Labour shortage and labour mismatch.

Regardless of the global hospitality industry being labelled as an industry suffering from a labour shortage, a publication by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland

categorizes the hospitality industry in Finland as suffering more from **labour market mismatch** than from labour shortage (Larja & Peltonen, 2023, pp. 20, 227–228). The publication explains that a labour mismatch happens when there are enough workers on the market however, it is still challenging to match these workers with open jobs (Larja & Peltonen, 2023, p. 9). However, the term "labour shortage" is still widely used by industry professionals, as well as MaRa ry, which is the association that represents the hospitality industry in Finland (MaRa, 2023a). According to MaRa, there is a shortage of skilled workers in many sectors in Finland, however, the labour shortage affects especially the tourism, restaurant, and event sectors.

According to the Labour Force Barometer (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö & Elinkeino, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskus, 2024) most regions in Finland suffer from either moderate or serious labour mismatch, with the top 10 positions being: waiters, cooks, fast food preparers, conference and event planners, chefs, kitchen helpers, food service counter attendants, bartenders, hotel receptionists and restaurant managers. The labour shortage was recorded in Lapland, South Ostrobothia, and other regions recorded suffering from labour mismatch (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö & Elinkeino, liikennne- ja ympäristökeskus, 2024). The forecast for October 2024 did not look promising either, with labour shortage extending to the South Savo region as well (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö & Elinkeino, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskus, 2024). Overall, it could be concluded that there is a clear lack of workers to meet the demands of the hospitality industry in Finland. This shortage persists, despite the terminology used. Whether it is due to labour shortage or labour market mismatch, many positions in the industry remain unfilled.

As it was discussed in the previous chapter, the global hospitality industry is notorious for poor working conditions, low wages, and predominantly offering part-time or short-term employment, which contributes to employee uncertainty and financial instability (Larja & Peltonen, 2023, pp. 13–14, 19, 226; Robinson et al., 2019, pp. 1009–1011). This trend is reflected in Finland as well and perhaps explains some of the reasons for the labour mismatch: the publication by Larja and Peltonen (2023, pp. 13–14) categorizes the hospitality industry as offering mainly "unusual employment", meaning that the industry commonly offers part-time, short-term, seasonal or staff leasing employment. They further highlight that in 2022, only 31% of the hospitality jobs were full-time positions, in contrast in anticipation of future assignments (Larja & Peltonen, 2023, p. 11). Additionally, the industry falls into a low-income bracket with an hourly wage below the

national average, which is less than 16€/h (Larja & Peltonen, 2023, p. 19). Whereas in Finland (and the Nordics in general) working conditions are known to be well-regulated, evidence indicates that the hospitality industry faces challenges compared to other industries (Gjerald et al., 2021, p. 41).

2.3.2. COVID-19's effect on the Finnish hospitality industry

In 2019, the tourism & hospitality industry accounted for 2,7% of Finland's total gross domestic product (Kaihola, 2023, p. 11) and it marked the fourth consecutive growth year for the Finnish tourism and hospitality industry (Marski, 2021, p. 13). While the predictions for the 2020 numbers indicated continuous growth, the reality shattered when the COVID-19 virus began to spread around the world, reaching the Finnish Lapland at the end of January 2020 (Marski, 2021, p. 13). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared an international pandemic on March 11th 2020, and by the 16th of March, the Finnish government declared a national state of emergency, closing the international borders and placing restrictions affecting people's lives and organisations' operations (Karikallio & Arovuori, 2023, p. 3; Marski, 2021, p. 13), including closing or restricting access to public spaces, restaurants, hotels, etc. Besides closing the international borders, the national border of the Uusimaa region was temporarily closed between the 27th of March 2020 – the 19th of April 2020, further restricting the movement of people (Marski, 2021, p. 13).

According to Marski (2021, p. 13), the restrictions posed by the government and the closure of the international borders caused the number of travellers in Finland to decrease by 56,4% in March 2020 compared to March 2019, and by 98,8% in April 2020, compared to April 2019. While the state of emergency ended in Finland in June 2020, restrictions in the food & beverage sector continued, as opening hours and capacity remained reduced (Karikallio & Arovuori, 2023, p. 10). While throughout the summer of 2020 restrictions were loosened and international borders were opened to a certain extent, the fall of 2020 brought with it another wave of infections, causing the restrictions to tighten up again (Marski, 2021, p. 14). While the restrictions helped to control the spread of the virus, they unfortunately caused a lot of damage, specifically to the tourism and hospitality industry (Marski, 2021, p. 15).

to other industries, where the number was 45% (Larja & Peltonen, 2023, p. 226). Most hospitality job openings in Finland were also noted to be seasonal, part-time or staff leasing, and moreover, staffing agencies often recruit individuals into their "talent pools" The pandemic had indeed detrimental impacts on the hospitality and tourism sector, forcing many establishments to shut

down for extended periods or even permanently, which led to employees becoming furloughed, unemployed or in some cases, seeking employment in another industry completely (Harju-Myllyaho et al., 2022, p. 46; Karikallio & Arovuori, 2023, pp. 7–8).

2.3.3. Foreign workers in Finland

The labour shortage following the COVID-19 pandemic has become an obstacle to the recovery and growth of the tourism and hospitality sector, and it has been identified that the labour shortage cannot be corrected without foreign labour (MaRa 2023b.).

Larja and Peltonen's publication (2023, p. 32) reveals a very interesting finding about foreign labour in Finland: while it is recognised as a potential way to fill jobs not wanted by locals, the publication stresses that public funds should be used to attract labour mainly to more productive sectors. While entry-level (which are usually low-income) sectors like hospitality tend to attract foreign workers in Finland, the authors argue that if the goal of increasing work-based migration is to support public finances, then migrants should be directed toward higher-paying industries and jobs – specifically to those where salaries are at least 85% of the Finnish median salary (Larja & Peltonen, 2023, pp. 32, 41). The hospitality industry falls outside of this scope. Nevertheless, while attracting foreign labour to the hospitality industry using public-funded initiatives seems to be an unrealistic situation, it does not mean that Finland could not attract foreigners already residing in Finland.

According to Barona (2024), a Finnish company specialising in staffing and recruitment services, the 2024 employer survey indicates a significant trend toward increasing dependence on international talent, particularly in the IT, hospitality and manufacturing sectors. The survey findings reveal that a significant number of organisations in Finland are struggling with labour shortages, particularly in the above-mentioned sectors (Barona, 2024). Over a third of employers reported that the labour shortage has worsened since the pandemic, indicating a growing dependence on international talent. In fact, in the hospitality sector alone, foreign workers constitute approximately 50% of the workforce, showcasing a critical reliance on this demographic to meet labour demands (Barona, 2024).

Interestingly, the survey revealed a generally positive perception of international recruitment as a viable strategy to attract skilled workers (Barona, 2024). However, companies face notable challenges, including language barriers, legal complexities and cultural differences that hinder the

effective integration of foreign employees (Barona, 2024). Despite these obstacles, many organisations are keen to offer English language opportunities to facilitate smoother transitions for international staff (Barona, 2024).

The future outlook for the use of international talent is expected to rise, particularly in sectors experiencing transformation related to green initiatives and technology advancements (Barona, 2024). Companies are expressing a willingness to invest more in responsible and fair practices surrounding international recruitment, recognising the importance of fostering a diverse and skilled workforce, however, the survey highlights several obstacles that companies face when employing international workers (Barona, 2024). These include the necessity for strong Finnish language skills, legal requirements, and cultural resistance from existing staff members (Barona, 2024). Organisations that have not yet tapped into international labour often cite these barriers as significant deterrents (Barona, 2024).

In another survey conducted by the Confederation of Finnish Industries (Elinkeinoelämän Keskusliitto, EK), Finnish companies show a strong readiness to recruit foreign workers; approximately 43% of the respondents rated their capabilities as either “very good” or “good”, indicating a positive outlook towards integrating international talent (Elinkeinoelämän Keskusliitto, 2024). Just as in Barona’s survey, in the EK survey, the most significant barrier holding back the recruitment of foreign workers was the requirement of proficiency in domestic languages (Finnish & Swedish), with 52% of respondents highlighting this issue (Elinkeinoelämän Keskusliitto, 2024). This is in line with Barona’s (2024) findings, which indicate that language barriers remain a constant concern for companies hiring from abroad. In addition to this, the EK survey revealed that 46% of companies struggle with immigration-related bureaucracy, emphasising a necessity for more efficient immigration and permit processes, with 55% of the respondents indicating this as a priority (Elinkeinoelämän Keskusliitto, 2024).

The findings from both the Barona and EK surveys show that recruiting foreign talent in Finland is a complicated issue. Many companies are eager to hire international workers, but they still face important challenges. Based on these reports, it could be argued that addressing language barriers and streamlining bureaucratic processes will be essential for Finnish organisations to thrive in an increasingly globalised labour market.

3. ACCULTURATION AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, relocating to a new country can be a life-altering journey, and it entails much more than just crossing geographical borders. When individuals move to a new country, they must navigate the process of *psychological acculturation,* which is the individuals' process of adapting to the customs, beliefs, and behaviours of their new host culture (Berry, 1997, pp. 6–7). Literature on cross-cultural psychology focuses heavily on John W. Berry's (1997) work, which studied how people who have been raised in one culture behave when moved to a place with a different culture. Berry's (1997, pp. 8–9) research highlights the transformation of societies into "culturally plural" entities, where people from various backgrounds coexist, leading to acculturation processes.

Examining acculturation strategies in the context of foreign hospitality workers is something that has been identified as needed, as literature supports that acculturation is a vital part of employee integration in a culturally diverse workforce, where cultural differences can make or break the employee experience (Taylor & Finley, 2010, p. 681). If we circle back to the previous chapters, it has been noted that recruiting migrant workers into the hospitality industry can backfire if sufficient effort is not put into their integration into the workplace and host society (Duncan et al., 2013, p. 10).

In this chapter, the complexities of acculturation will be explored with the help of Berry's acculturation strategy and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. The objective is to reveal the challenges faced by immigrants as they navigate the complexities of cultural adaptation in the Finnish context, both in the workplace and in society. While Berry's strategies capture individual adaptation responses, Hofstede's dimensions, such as power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, can help explain the structural cultural expectations influencing these responses (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 401–402). In combining these theories, the study addresses how personal and societal values shape the experiences of foreign hospitality workers (Ermolaeva & Sisson, 2023, p. 630). Specifically, it examines how these individuals' cultural adaptation strategies align or clash with Finnish workplace norms, which are influenced by high individualism and relatively low power distance (Hofstede, 2010). Additionally, this chapter will look into culture itself: what actually is culture and what shapes a culture.

3.1. Berry's Four Acculturation Strategies

Berry developed four acculturation strategies in the 1970s: assimilation, separation, marginalisation, and integration (Tadmor et al., 2009, p. 106). Each acculturation strategy describes the course an individual takes when having their own cultural identity but being expected to adapt to the more dominant culture of the country they have immigrated to.

According to Berry (1997, p. 9) *assimilation* involves fully adapting to the new host culture by letting go of one's original culture, while *separation* entails preserving one's original culture entirely and rejecting the dominant culture. He further explains that *marginalization* is often a response to discrimination, and occurs when an individual distances themselves completely from both their old and new host cultures, feeling unable to maintain their native culture and often experiencing exclusion (Berry, 1997, p. 9). *Integration*, on the other hand, means simultaneously maintaining one's original culture while adapting to the new host culture (Berry, 1997, p. 9; Tadmor et al., 2009, p. 106).

Nonetheless, the creation of this acculturation categories model has encountered some criticism from at least two viewpoints (Rudmin, 2003, pp. 4–5). The criticism is placed on the generalisation that all four categories exist and hold equal validity (Rudmin, 2003, p. 5), when in fact research indicates that marginalisation is not as frequently observed (Del Pilar & Udasco, 2004, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 239) and if it does, the results are considered to be low in validity and reliability (Cuellar et al., 1995; Unger et al., 2002 as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 239). Another criticism aimed at the acculturation strategies is that the model implies that all individuals have similar backgrounds, and does not take into consideration important factors, such as what is the individual's reason for immigrating, from where they are immigrating from and where they are immigrating to (Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 240).

Very interesting points were made in the work of Schwartz et al. (2010, p. 239) in that the cultural differences between the country of origin and the receiving country can lead to significant stressors that influence how individuals navigate acculturation. For example, differences in languages (Schwartz et al., 2010, pp. 239–240), and cultural values, such as whether a country leans towards individualism or collectivism, represent substantial distinctions between the home country and the host country that play a crucial role in shaping acculturation strategies (Triandis, 1995, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 237).

Although Berry's acculturation strategies offer a useful framework for understanding how individuals adjust to a new cultural environment, they are somewhat limited in how deeply they consider each individual's personal backgrounds (Berry, 1997, pp. 8–9). The model focuses primarily on how people manage the balance between adapting to the host culture and maintaining their cultural roots (Berry, 1997, pp. 9–10). While it does recognise elements like cultural identity and the importance of preserving one's heritage, it does not fully reflect the individual's unique experiences or motivations for migration (Berry, 1997, p. 8). In fact, factors such as whether migration is voluntary or forced, the permanence of the relocation, or how welcoming the host society is, can significantly shape acculturation outcomes (Berry, 1997, pp. 10–11, 16). These personal and contextual factors suggest that although Berry's strategies serve as helpful general categories, they should not be viewed as one-size-fits-all solutions to the complex process of cultural adaptation (Berry, 1997, p. 17).

In fact, in his work "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation", Berry recognises that the selection of an acculturation strategy can also be influenced by various external factors beyond an individual's control (Berry, 1997, pp. 8–9, 10–11, 16–17). The voluntariness of the move to another country, for example, is seen as an affecting matter in the acculturation process; while some individuals immigrate for various personal or work-related reasons, for others, immigration may be involuntary and thus it might come with resistance (Berry, 1997, pp. 8–9, 16). In addition to this, it was further specified by Steiner (2009, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 241), that voluntary immigrants are often more welcomed to the host society by the locals, as they can be seen as a valuable addition to their community and economy due to their profession, whereas involuntary immigrants, such as refugees, are more seen as a burden to the society. In addition to this, the permanency of the relocation is recognised as an affecting element by Berry (1997, p. 8) and Steiner (2009, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 240) e.g. students, seasonal workers, or asylum seekers.

In his article, Berry has also described how the choice of acculturation strategy is not always available to be chosen by the individual, but in fact can be influenced by the dominant group (the host culture), as they can limit the options available to non-dominant individuals (immigrants); according to Berry (1997, pp. 10–11), for successful integration to occur in a host society, certain conditions must be met, including a willingness to embrace cultural diversity and a low prevalence

of prejudice. Additionally, Berry further emphasises the importance of mutual understanding and acceptance between the dominant and non-dominant groups. This entails non-dominant individuals being open to adopting the social norms and values of the host society, while also being allowed and welcomed by the host society to preserve elements of their own cultural heritage (Berry, 1997, pp. 10, 17).

According to Berry (1997, pp. 9–10)The four acculturation strategies mentioned earlier apply when individuals from the non-dominant culture can freely choose their approach. However, when acculturation is imposed by the host society, different terms are used. For example, what might be considered a voluntary decision to separate from one's original culture and fully adopt the host society's culture can, when enforced, be classified as *segregation* (Berry, 1997, p. 10). Similarly, Berry describes assimilation using the commonly known term *"melting pot"*, but compares enforced assimilation to a *"pressure cooker"*(Berry, 1997, p. 10) illustrating how societal pressure to assimilate can shift from a deliberate process to a potentially explosive situation.

National policies and programs can also be evaluated based on acculturation strategies, as outlined by Berry in his work from 1990 (Berry, 1997, p. 11). According to this, nations which expect all immigrants to fully transform their cultural values and norms to the ones of the host societies are called *assimilationists,* and those nations fully accepting of incorporating all groups into their larger society are called *Integrationists* (Berry, 1997, pp. 11, 17). Furthermore, those enforcing *segregationist* policies have, in some cases, "sought out the *marginalisation* of unwanted groups", as noted by Berry (1997, p. 11). Segregationist nations (and those enforcing marginalisation) may contribute to discrimination within the non-dominant group, potentially triggering a phenomenon known as *"reactive ethnicity"* (Rumbaut, 2008, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 240). According to Rumbaut (2008, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 241) reactive ethnicity describes a situation in which discrimination intensifies immigrants' determination to preserve their cultural heritage, leading them to resist acculturation and reject integration into the host culture. On the contrary, an integrationist nation would be recognised, for example, by its willingness to provide social services such as health care and education with a culturally sensitive approach, e.g., taking into consideration cultural differences, religion, etc. (Murphy 1965 as cited in Berry, 1997, p. 17). Nations implementing a more integrational policy positively encourage the adaptation of minorities (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 396).

The aim of this thesis is not to precisely study which acculturation strategy each studied hospitality worker has adopted, since that would require larger quantitative research. Nevertheless, the acculturation strategies will be used as a benchmark to understand how the workers feel they can maintain their cultural identity in the Finnish culture.

3.2. Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Geert Hofstede was a Dutch psychologist and an anthropologist known for his pioneering research on cross-cultural differences and how culture influences behaviour in organisations and societies. He is most famous for developing ***Hofstede's cultural dimension theory,*** a framework for understanding cultural differences across countries. Hofstede's work built upon the ideas of sociologist Alex Inkeles and psychologist Daniel Levinson, who proposed that certain fundamental issues are universal (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 29–31). These common challenges influence how societies function on every level, from the way communities are structured to how individuals think and act within them (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 29–31).

Inkeles and Levinson (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 30) argued that all societies must find ways to deal with shared issues, such as how power is distributed, how individuals relate to each other and to society, and how conflict is handled. Hofstede built on these ideas by identifying patterns in how different cultures respond to these challenges. These patterns formed the basis for his dimensions, such as power distance, individualism vs. collectivism and masculinity vs. femininity (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 29–31)

Inkeles and Levinson identified the common problems in society in the first half of the 20th century (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 29), and 20 years later, Hofstede began developing his cultural dimension theory when he had the chance to work with a large international dataset gathered from IBM employees (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 30–31). The data consisted of values of IBM employees from over 50 countries, and the data showed that while people across countries faced similar challenges, the ways they responded often depended on their own culture (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 30–31). In other words, the problem areas identified by Levinston and Inkeles were empirically found in the data studied by Hofstede, representing the *dimensions of culture*.

Hofstede's work on cultural dimensions reflects how different societies address these issues of authority, self-perception, and conflict (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 30–31). He defined cultural

dimensions as aspects of a culture that can be measured relative to other countries, and he named four core dimensions (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 31):

1. Power distance
2. Individualism vs Collectivism
3. Masculinity vs. Femininity
4. Uncertainty Avoidance

In relation to Inkeles' and Levinson's ideas, power distance measures the degree to which a society accepts and expects an unequal distribution of power (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 55–56). According to Hofstede (2010, pp. 60–61), in high power distance cultures, authority is centralised, and hierarchy is respected. In low power distance cultures, people expect more equality and are comfortable challenging authority (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 60–61). Hofstede's dimension of individualism vs. collectivism captures the different ways societies balance personal autonomy with group loyalty (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 90–92). Individualistic cultures prioritise personal goals and independence, while collectivist cultures emphasise the importance of group cohesion and interdependence. Finally, the masculinity vs. femininity dimension reflects the cultural importance placed on traditional gender roles (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 137–240). Societies with high masculinity tend to prioritise competition, success, and assertiveness, while more feminine cultures value cooperation, quality of life, and emotional connection (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 139–140). The uncertainty avoidance dimension measures how a society deals with ambiguity and uncertainty, particularly in terms of aggression and emotional expression (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 188–195).

The IBM research conducted by Hofstede has been replicated on several occasions, including by Hofstede himself; in the 1970s, Hofstede surveyed 15 other managers outside of the original IBM pool from different countries and found that the differences found in the original IBM surveys, applied elsewhere as well (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 34). Several other researchers have either used the IBM questionnaires or modified versions of it for their research. These replicated studies aimed to test the strength of Hofstede's dimensions and further explore cultural variations (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 34). Another matter that supports Hofstede's cultural dimensions comes from an independent study conducted in the 1970s by U.S. psychologist Milton Rokeach called "Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 37). Michale Harris Bond from a Chinese University

analysed the RVS data using the same method Hofstede had used in his analyses of the IBM data and discovered 4 powerful dimensions, and in 6 countries that participated in both studies, he found a significant correlation between the RVS and IBM data, reinforcing the validity of Hofstede's dimensions (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 37). However, since both Bond and Hofstede come from Western cultures, concerns arose relating to the Western nature of the surveys, and whether the correlation between these surveys had something to do with this (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 37). Bond created a solution, where he asked his colleagues from Hong Kong and Taiwan to come up with values specifically for Chinese people, and added them to a new questionnaire that became known as the *Chinese Value Survey (CVS)* (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 37).

The results from the CVS came back with four dimensions again, from which three dimensions replicated those already found in the IBM surveys (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 37–38, 236). The fourth dimension was one of the most important findings from the CVS, as it was not present in Hofstede's original framework: Long-Term Orientation (LTO), which was adopted as a fifth dimension (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 38) and renamed Long-term Orientation vs Short-term Orientation (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239). The reason it was not found in the IBM data was that relevant questions were not asked (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239). Long-term orientation is future-focused, adaptive, and persistent, while Short-term orientation is present-focused, traditional, and seeks immediate outcomes (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239).

Understanding Finland's cultural framework according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions is essential for this study, as it will be used to analyse the experience and adaptation of foreign hospitality workers in the Finnish workplace. The next chapter will explore each dimension in more detail and explores how Finland ranks in each of them. Additionally, the relevance of each dimension in this research will be briefly discussed.

3.2.1. Power Distance

Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) is a cultural dimension that measures the extent to which inequality and authority are accepted in a society (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 53–54). In other words, PDI reflects employees' perception of hierarchy, leadership styles, and communication patterns in the workplace (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 55–56, 60). Countries that score lower on the PDI, value egalitarianism, open dialogue, and decentralised decision-making, while high PDI tend to favour hierarchical structures, centralised power, and formal authority (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 60–62).

Finland's Power Distance Index is 33 (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 59), highlighting an egalitarian society. This low PDI manifests in various aspects of social structure, workplace culture, and communication styles, reinforcing the country's commitment to equality and democratic values. Informal interaction, modesty and humility could manifest as the lack of formal titles in the workplace, addressing superiors by their first name and the avoidance of overly displays of power or authority. In Finland, workplaces tend to be decentralised and non-hierarchical, with flatter organisational structures that promote collaboration and mutual respect (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 73–75). Finnish managers and superiors are generally expected to be approachable, consultative, and participatory, rather than autocratic or paternalistic. It is very common in Finland that employees are encouraged to express their opinions freely. Additionally, the decision-making process often includes team discussion, rather than top-down directives.

In the context of this study, an egalitarian workplace may foster a sense of inclusion for foreign hospitality workers. Communication with management and colleagues might feel easier for the workers. However, if a worker comes from a nation with a high PDI, an environment of low hierarchy might initially feel uncomfortable and maybe even inappropriate.

3.2.2. Individualism vs. Collectivism

This dimension explains how societies prioritise either individual autonomy or group cohesion, shaping social structures, decision-making, and interpersonal behaviour (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 92–93). Individualistic societies emphasise personal independence, self-reliance, and individual achievements (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 106–108). People in these societies are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families, and success is often measured by personal accomplishments rather than collective contributions (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 106–108). Additionally, people in individualistic societies are more likely to change jobs for better opportunities (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 120).

Opposingly, collectivist societies integrate people into strong, lifelong groups, such as extended families, communities, or organisations. These collectives provide support in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 107–108). Relationships tend to be more hierarchical and interdependent, and additionally, workplace environments tend to be structured around long-term relationships and a sense of duty to the organisation, rather than personal ambition (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 120–123).

Finland ranks higher in this dimension, with a score of 63 (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 95), meaning that Finland could be considered a moderately Individualistic nation. Finnish society does value personal responsibility, self-reliance, and independence; however, the society also maintains elements of social welfare and community support.

Moderate individualism manifests in the workplace through several characteristics, such as through straightforward communication, reflecting the individualistic preference for honesty and clarity (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 107, 114). Unlike in collectivist nations, where communication is more indirect to preserve harmony, Finnish professionals typically express their opinions openly, without excessive concern for hierarchical status. In addition to communication, individualistic societies respect boundaries, and this can be seen in Finland's respect for work-life balance; employees expect their personal time to be respected (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 120). Furthermore, in Finland, employees are expected to work autonomously and to manage their tasks without excessive supervision (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 106–108), which is another characteristic of an individualistic nation.

Interestingly, Hofstede's research suggests that higher economic development correlates with greater individualism, while developing nations tend to be more collectivist (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 93–94). Finland's strong economy and its emphasis on education can be seen to support the individualistic tendencies, encouraging self-sufficiency and personal growth. However, Finland still maintains some collective characteristics, especially when it comes to its social welfare systems and cooperative workplace practices,

Foreign workers coming from collectivist societies will likely have to adapt to Finland's individualistic nature. Individual responsibility and self-reliance are highly valued in Finnish workplaces, meaning that foreign workers may need to become comfortable with independent decision-making, minimal supervision, and taking initiative in their roles. Unlike in collectivist cultures, where teamwork and group consensus are prioritised, the Finnish work environment emphasises personal accountability.

3.2.3. Masculinity vs. Femininity

According to Hofstede (2010, p. 137) even if two cultures share similar scores in PDI and Individualism vs. Collectivism, they may be opposite in terms of Masculinity vs. Femininity. This

dimension examines how societies balance competitive drive (masculinity) against care, collaboration, and quality of life (femininity) (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 138–139).

Hofstede (2010, pp. 137–138) defines masculinity as a cultural preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material success. In masculine societies, gender roles are distinct: men are expected to be ambitious and competitive, while women are often seen as nurturing and focused on quality of life (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 138). Conversely, femininity reflects a preference for relationships, modesty, and consensus, with overlapping gender roles where both men and women emphasise balance between work and life (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 138–140).

In masculine countries, societal norms encourage individuals to strive for the best, fostering a competitive environment, and success is often measured by material achievements and recognition (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 138–139). In contrast, feminine cultures prioritise well-being and consensus, associating success with maintaining harmony and enjoying quality of life (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 138–139).

According to Hofstede's(2010, pp. 139–140) study, masculine societies often exhibit distinct gender roles in professional settings; men typically occupy positions of power, while women are in supportive roles. The workplace environment is competitive, with an emphasis on performance and achievement. On the other hand, Hofstede (2010, pp. 139–140) finds that in feminine societies, gender equality is promoted in the workplace; feminine cultures focus on collaboration, employee well-being, and work-life balance. Decision-making processes in feminine cultures furthermore often involve seeking consensus and valuing input from all levels of the organisation.(Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 139–140).

Educational systems in masculine cultures tend to emphasise competition, excellence, and achievement. Students are encouraged to excel and be the best in their fields. In feminine cultures, education focuses on cooperation, social interaction, and the holistic development of students. The aim is to foster a supportive learning environment that values each individual's well-being(Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 159–162).

However, this dimension has faced significant scholarly criticism, according to Moulettes (2007), particularly for relying on outdated data, and a gender-biased sample that excludes women's perspectives (McSweeney, 2002 as cited in Moulettes, 2007, p. 445). Additionally, other critics

argue that Hofstede's essentialist view of gender reinforces stereotypes, rather than reflecting cultural complexity (Cray & Mallory, 1998, p.57). According to Moullettes (2007, p. 449), scholars also challenge Hofstede's national classifications, noting contradictions in this (MAS) dimension. While Hofstede suggests masculine cultures limit leadership, nations like the Philippines, India, and Pakistan have had female leaders, whereas Sweden, ranked highly feminine, has not (Hofstede, 2001, p. 312).

Finland ranks relatively low in this dimension, with a ranking of 26 (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 143), meaning that according to Hofstede's theory, Finland as a society values cooperation, equality and work-life balance, over competition and material success. Despite criticism over the validity of this dimension, Hofstede's assessment appears accurate for Finland, reflecting the nation's emphasis on egalitarianism and collective well-being. I would expect this dimension to emerge when participants discuss work-life balance, hierarchies and modesty.

3.2.4. Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) explored how different societies respond to the inherent ambiguities and unpredictability of life. It reflects the degree to which members of a culture feel threated by uncertain or unknown situations, and how they seek to minimize these feelings through rules, structure, and behaviour (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 191). Typical characteristics of nations scoring high on UAI, are strict rule following, formal procedures and seeking clarity and predictability, while characteristics of low UAI nations include embracing flexibility and change (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 197–198).

According to Hofstede (2010, p. 209), in societies with high UAI, predictability is valued, and people prefer formal structure, strict rules, and clean hierarchies. Change may be resisted, and unconventional behaviour or thinking can be stigmatised. Emotional responses to uncertain or ambiguous situations tend to be more intense, with a preference for order and clarity (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 209). Societies with low UAI, on the other hand, have a greater tolerance for ambiguity, are less resilient to formal rules and have an openness to innovation and new ideas (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 210). These societies are more accepting of risk and are more likely to view change as a positive opportunity rather than a threat.

In workplace settings, societies with high uncertainty avoidance tend to prefer well-defined procedures, structured environments, and clear role expectations to help manage risk and ambiguity

(Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 205–206). Employees in this context may seek stability and firm guidance in order to feel secure in their roles. On the other hand, in low UAI societies, there is often more room for flexibility and creativity, where individuals are encouraged to think independently and take initiative in more dynamic and entrepreneurial roles (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 205–206). At the societal level, societies high in uncertainty avoidance tend to preserve traditional practices and are more cautious about changing social norms or institutions. Meanwhile, societies with low UAI are typically more adaptive to change, often willing to question tradition and embrace diverse perspectives and lifestyles (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 205–206).

Although Finland's specific UAI score is 59, meaning it is in a moderate range, Finland's cultural characteristics lean toward those typically associated with lower uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 191). Finland is known for its pragmatism, resilience, and flexibility, particularly within the workplace and educational context. In a professional environment, innovation and independence are valued, with employees expected to manage their responsibilities autonomously – an approach that reflects a balanced tolerance for ambiguity and structured guidance (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 205–206).

Similarly, Finland's education system promotes creative thinking and integrative learning over rigid standardization, which is demonstrated in its national education policy (Opetushallitus, 2014, p. 32). The National Curriculum for Basic Education (Opetushallitus, 2014, pp. 32–33) outlines the importance of encouraging students to make connections across subject boundaries and to engage with the content that reflects real-life contexts and societal changes. The curriculum requires schools to include multidisciplinary learning modules, which help students combine knowledge from different subjects and work together in meaningful ways (Opetushallitus, 2014, p. 32). These modules also aim to build critical thinking and the ability to handle complex situations, skills especially valued in cultures that are more comfortable with uncertainty (Opetushallitus, 2014, p. 33).

In my research, I could expect this dimension to surface when participants discuss the clarity (or lack of clarity) in job roles, the onboarding process, or communication from management. Foreign workers who come from cultures with either very high or low uncertainty avoidance may experience friction: some might find Finnish workplaces too unstructured or ambiguous, while others may appreciate the balance of guidance and independence. I could anticipate that a desire

for clear expectations, defined procedures, and transparent communication will be recurring themes, especially among those who are new to Finnish work culture and seeking a sense of stability amidst cultural transition.

3.2.5. Long-Term Orientation

Hofstede defines Long-Term Orientation (LTO) as a dimension that explores how societies balance their focus between the future and the present, or the past (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239). This cultural dimension highlights whether a society values future-oriented virtues such as perseverance, adaptability, and thrift, or whether it emphasises tradition, immediate results, and stability (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239).

Cultures with a long-term orientation encourage behaviours that support future rewards. These include persistence in achieving long-term goals, careful resource management, and openness to changing traditions when necessary (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 243–244, 251). Education plays a central role in these societies, with a strong emphasis on preparing younger generations to succeed in a changing world, and long-term oriented societies are more likely to accept innovation, adapt to societal shifts, and support sustainable economic and social policies (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 243–244, 251).

On the other hand, societies with short-term orientation tend to prioritise respect for traditions, fulfilling immediate social obligations, and achieving outcomes quickly (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 275). Stability and resistance to change are common traits in such cultures, as they place greater importance on maintaining established social structures and customs (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 251). In both business and education, this difference can be seen to shape organisational strategies, attitudes towards planning, and innovation. For instance, short-term societies may prioritise short-term gains and traditional methods in business, while long-term societies focus on relationship building, gradual success, and strategic investments (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 266–276).

Finland exhibits a moderate to high level of long-term orientation, although it is not among the highest-scoring nations on this dimension. Nonetheless, Finnish culture exhibits several traits associated with long-term thinking, education is a clear example: Finnish policymakers have made sustained investments in a system that emphasises not only academic excellence but also student well-being, critical thinking and future readiness (Finnish Government, 2023, pp. 86–102). In terms of economic policy, several publications support claims for Finland's emphasis on sustainability,

environmental protection, and long-term innovation strategies, particularly in fields such as green energy and technology (International Energy Agency, 2023; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2022; State Treasury Republic of Finland, 2025).

I believe the dimension of LTO will manifest in this research through sustainability, continuous development and long-term employee wellbeing. From the perspective of foreign workers, this might become visible in how employers approach training, integration, and career planning. However, if participants come from short-term oriented countries, where immediate results or quick employment turnover are common, they might perceive a disconnection in expectations. I expect narratives to reveal differences in how time, loyalty and future planning are valued, with some participants potentially expressing surprise or discomfort at the slower, strategic pace typical of Finnish organisational culture.

3.3. The Layers of Culture

Hofstede(2001, p. 1) defines culture as: "the collective programming of the mind that differentiates the members of one group or category of people from others". Culture is understood as a shared system of meaning within a group, though individuals still retain personal differences (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 6). Culture can exist at many levels, including national, organisational, generational, or gender-based, and its meaning often depends on the level at which it is examined (Berry et al., 2011, pp. 106–107, 224). While national and societal cultures are typically learned early in life and are deeply ingrained, workplace of professional cultures are learned later in life, and are more adaptable, changing when individuals move between different job environments (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 10–11).

To describe the complexities and layers of culture, Hofstede introduced "the onion model" of culture, where different layers represent different cultural elements (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 8–9). The outermost layer consists of symbols, which are words, objects, gestures, or clothing that carry specific meanings within a group (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 8–9). These are often visible to outsiders, but their significance is better understood by members of that culture. Beneath that are heroes, real or fictional figures who embody cultural ideals and serve as role models (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 8–9). In Western societies, for example, figures like Batman or Barbie might represent certain values, while in Finland, heroes might include national figures like Tove Jansson or the Momins.

The next layer is made or rituals, which are collective activities that may appear ordinary to insiders but can seem unfamiliar or confusing to outsiders, such as ways of greeting, celebrating, or communicating professionally (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 8–9). Together, symbols, heroes, and rituals form the category of practices, which are observable behaviours shaped by the underlying cultural values of a group (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 8–9).

At the core of the onion model are values, the most deeply rooted aspect of culture. Hofstede (2001, p. 5) defines values as: "a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others". These values reflect basic ideas about what is considered right or wrong, good or bad, or normal and abnormal (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 10–11). They are learned early in life and are the slowest to change, even when individuals encounter new cultural environments (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 10–11). While people may adopt new practices over time, their core values tend to remain relatively stable, forming the basis for how they interpret and respond to the world around them (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 19–21)

Chung (2011, p. 402) offers a similar idea, by comparing culture to an iceberg; the visible part represents behaviours and customs, while the much larger, hidden part includes the unconscious values and beliefs that shape those behaviours. This metaphor, along with Hofstede's onion model, highlights why understanding culture requires more than just observing outward actions. It involves recognising the deeper meanings and internal frameworks that guide those actions, and the idea that is particularly relevant when studying how people adjust to new cultural settings. Acculturation, as it has been discussed earlier, is a complex process that involves not only adopting new customs but also balancing them with one's original cultural identity and values. It requires emotional resilience, adaptability, and a nuanced understanding of cultural differences.

4. PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Phenomenology, at its core, is a philosophical tradition that revolves around the individual self and how this self perceives and experiences existence (Heidegger, 1962 & Husselr, 1975 as cited in Kirillova, 2018, p. 3327; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1056). For example, phenomenology emphasises how we perceive the world and objects around us, such as vehicles, books, and buildings. It looks at how people personally make sense of their experiences, whether they are reading a book, visiting a historic site or travelling to a holiday destination (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1056). This contrasts with many other philosophical perspectives that primarily examine the objective facts of reality (Kirillova, 2018, p. 3327).

According to Kirillova (2018, p. 3327) Phenomenology is used in, for example, healthcare studies to explore how individuals understand and feel about their lived experiences. In addition to this, many other fields, such as psychology, education and management, also find value in adopting its approach to human experience (Kirillova, 2018, p. 3327). In tourism and hospitality studies, it is gaining attention and being acknowledged for its potential to understand the experiences of various stakeholders, such as customers, employees and locals, and how they interpret and make sense of their experience within this phenomenon (Kirillova, 2018, pp. 3327, 3333; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1056), something that might go unnoticed when using alternative approaches (Sharma & Altinay, 2012, pp. 946–647). Whereas phenomenology has been used in several tourism & hospitality studies, authors such as Pernecky and Jamal (2010, p. 1057) argue that these phenomenological studies are ambiguous at best.

Phenomenology has been acknowledged as a challenging research method, mainly due to the lack of existing guidance and familiarity, as well as for its complexity (Kirillova, 2018, p. 3327; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1057). This has caused shortcomings in existing research, according to Pernecky and Jamal (2010, pp. 1057–1058), some studies lack clear justification and explanation of their approach, fail to elaborate on the philosophy of phenomenology or demonstrate its theoretical application to applied research, omit descriptions of the philosophical or theoretical considerations guiding the study, and neglect to provide a clear account of the employed methodology or specify the phenomenological approach followed. In addition to this, Kirillova (2018, p. 3327) identified that phenomenology is sometimes used to: “justify small sample sizes

and is confused with other interpretative qualitative approaches". Despite the challenging nature of phenomenology, I believe that it could provide a unique insight into the experiences of migrant workers, potentially yielding valuable data, especially during times of labour shortages. Phenomenology provides a lens for understanding how individuals perceive and make sense of their lived experiences(Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1056). Since this approach centres on capturing and interpreting subjective experiences, it is particularly well-suited to studying the complex, personal journey of acculturation (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1056). In this study, particularly interpretive phenomenology guides the exploration of foreign hospitality workers' adaptation experiences in Finland, focusing on how cultural challenges and values impact their acculturation processes.

I believe that my study brings together the theoretical framework and phenomenological approach in a way that highlights both personal and social sides of cultural adaptation. While not many studies I found use phenomenology to explore acculturation and cultural dimensions, its focus on lived experience makes it a good fit for understanding how people actually deal with cultural change in real-life settings. By combining theory with firsthand experiences, this approach can show how ideas like Berry's acculturation strategies and Hofstede's cultural dimensions show up in the everyday lives of migrant workers in Finland's hospitality industry.

4.1. Interpretive Phenomenology

As mentioned briefly in the "Methodology" chapter, phenomenology has two main orientations: *descriptive* and *interpretive* phenomenology (which is also known as *Hermeneutic phenomenology*, because of its close association with hermeneutics), which will be explained in more detail here, to further clarify the differences and justify the selection of Interpretive phenomenology for this study.

Descriptive phenomenology was created by Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher, in the early 20th century, and his methods seek to describe the essence of experiences (Gill, 2014, p. 119; Kirillova, 2018, p. 3328; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1063). Characteristic of descriptive phenomenology is its "bracketing", a fundamental step in the analytical process (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 11; Gill, 2014, pp. 119–120). The concept of "bracketing" refers to setting aside any assumptions or explanations about what causes an experience, so the focus stays purely on how the person actually experiences it (Cerbone, 2014, p. 22).

Interpretive phenomenology was created by Martin Heidegger, who started as Husserl's student but ended up publishing his own views on phenomenology in 1927 in the form of the book "Being and time" (Cerbone, 2014, pp. 39–40). Being handpicked personally by Husserl to continue his success in phenomenology, Heidegger abandoned the views of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, and in his book, he introduced Interpretive phenomenology (Cerbone, 2014, pp. 39–40). Contrary to Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, Heidegger's phenomenology differs significantly in terms of methods as well as outcomes and rejects all forms of bracketing (Cerbone, 2014, p. 44). Heidegger believed that how humans exist and experience the world relies on interpretation and understanding, and he thought of language as the foundation of our being (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1064). Authors Pernecky and Jamal (2010, p. 1064) argue that all experiences are shaped by interpretation, meaning that we always approach the world through a particular lens, even scientific knowledge, they argue, is not neutral or objective, but influenced by the context and perspective of the research. This distinguishes Heideggerian phenomenology from Husserlian phenomenology, as Heidegger believed we should explore and question what shapes our experience, rather than just describe them (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1068). In other words, as mentioned by Pernecky and Jamal (2010, p. 1068), phenomenology "not only looks at what is being interpreted but also considers the process of interpretation and the role of the interpreter.". If Husserl suggested that the researcher should eliminate all their pre-assumptions and prior knowledge to be able to study the phenomena, Heidegger suggests that our pre-existing understanding shapes how we experience and make sense of the world, and prior knowledge and expectations play a fundamental role in how we interpret and understand new information or experiences (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1066). Interpretive phenomenology was chosen as the methodology for this research due to my personal perspectives and experience that I wanted to include in the interpretation.

Heidegger's approach to phenomenology focuses on how people make sense of their experiences, not just by describing what happened, but by interpreting what those experiences mean to them (Gill, 2014, p. 120; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1064). He uses the term *Dasein* to describe the human way of being – how we exist in the world and try to understand it (Kirillova, 2018, p. 3329). This idea fits well with the goals of this study, which looks at how foreign hospitality workers interpret their everyday experiences in a new cultural environment.

Another important part of Heidegger's thinking is that our understanding is always shaped by the time, place and culture we come from – a concept he named *historicity* (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1064).That makes this approach especially useful for research involving people from different cultural backgrounds. Heidegger also talked about the *hermeneutic circle*, which means that we often move back and forth between the small details and the bigger picture when we are trying to understand something (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1068). That process reflects how I approach this study – looking at each participant's story while also keeping in mind the wider cultural and workplace context they are part of.

The choice of interpretive phenomenology allows this study to explore participants' experiences in depth, capturing the subtle and complex ways they navigate cultural adaptation. This approach aligns with the aim of understanding not just the visible aspects of acculturation, but also the internal and often unspoken interpretations participants form about their cultural identities and workplace integration. Additionally, this approach is in line with Kong et al. (2018, pp. 2181–2184), who found that job satisfaction in hospitality is affected by many factors, such as personal experiences, workplace conditions, and social dynamics, which are best understood through in/depth research.

4.2. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, also known as IPA, is used to examine individual experiences, what those experiences mean to them and how they understand them (Smith, 2011, p. 9). According to Smith (2011, p. 9) the foundation of IPA is built on three ideas: phenomenology, which looks at how people experience things from their own perspective; hermeneutics, which is about interpreting those experiences, and idiography, which focuses on understanding each person's story in detail, rather than making generalisations. Furthermore, Smith (2011, p. 10) describes IPA as: "engaging in double hermeneutics, whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them".

Particular to the IPA process compared to other qualitative analyses, it is how the data is processed: in addition to finding common themes that many participants might mention, it is also important to look for unique themes that only some participants might experience (Smith, 2011, p. 10). A right balance between convergence and divergence must thus be found, to recognise both the shared human experiences, and the individual nuances within them (Smith, 2011, p. 10). Due to the

intensity of the qualitative analysis of IPA, the studied sample tends to be smaller than in other qualitative methods and data is commonly gathered through semi-structured or in-depth interviews (Smith, 2011, p. 10).

IPA was used to identify and interpret key themes in participants' stories. This approach helped reveal how they made sense of their adaptation strategies, their reactions to cultural values like individualism or power distance, and the meanings they attach to these experiences. Interpretive phenomenology will provide a deep look into personal perceptions and broader social factors, showing how concepts like integration or separation play out in real life.

4.3. Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research due to their flexibility to simultaneously guide the interview through pre-determined questions while leaving enough space for open discussion and interpretations (Galletta, 2016, pp. 45–47). In addition to this, since the data will be analysed using the IPA method, it is crucial to choose a data-gathering method that enables a thorough examination of the participants' experiences. Due to my inexperienced nature of myself as an interviewer, I disregarded in-depth interviews, since I found it more challenging and riskier for a novice interviewer.

Galletta (2016, p. 46) suggests that the interview should be sectioned into 3 parts: the opening segment, the middle segment and the concluding segment. In the opening segment, Galletta (2016, p. 47) suggests that the interview should start by clarifying the objective of the study and making sure the interviewee feels comfortable and understands their right to participate in the interview. When initiating the actual interview, it is important to open with a broader question to encourage the participant to initiate conversation and share their experiences on the phenomenon being interviewed (Galletta, 2016, p. 47). According to Galletta (2016, pp. 47–48), this is the most important part of the interview, as it can set the tone for the rest of the interview and it is important that the interviewer listens carefully to the participant, and if necessary probes for additional clarification to make sure the interviewer and the interviewee are on the same page about the topic. While semi-structured interviews begin with pre-determined questions, it is typical for the interviewees to mention certain events or experiences early on that the interviewer deems significant and worth further exploration (Galletta, 2016, p. 47). In such instances, Galletta (2016,

p. 47) emphasises that it is common for the interviewer to take notes on these points, planning to revisit them at an appropriate later moment.

The opening segment of the interview should be designed so that the interviewer learns to know the participant's views and experiences, and it is seen as the beginning of the story that the interviewer will keep going back to throughout the interview (Galletta, 2016, p. 48). The questions should be open and not too focused on theoretical bias, however, as Galletta (2016, p. 48) advises, they should still be influenced by the larger idea guiding the whole interview. In designing the opening questions, it is extremely important to consider *why* and *how* each question is relevant and how they can contribute to the studied phenomena (Galletta, 2016, p. 49). In my interview guide, I included questions such as: "*Could you describe your background and what brought you to Finland to work in the hospitality industry?"* and "*How have you found adapting to Finnish work culture?".* These were linked to the research aim of exploring adaptation and integration and were influenced by Berry's (1997) and Hofstede's (2010) frameworks. The questions were open-ended to allow space for interpretation, as recommended by IPA (Smith, 2011).

The middle part of a semi-structured interview, according to Galletta (2016, p. 49) should focus deeper into the studied phenomena, and is subject to the research approach and goals. Using the pre-determined questions, as well as what was learned in the opening segment, this section aims to get even more specific and detailed information (Galletta, 2016, p. 49). In practice, this means discussing how participants perceived inclusion, hierarchy, or communication, using questions such as: "*Have you noticed any significant differences between work cultures in Finland and your home country?"*. While in the opening segment, the interviewer should hold back on asking too specific questions, this segment should be designed to be more focused, yet care should be taken in not making the participant uncomfortable, according to Galletta (2016, p. 50).

The concluding segment is where the interviewer can revisit any topics from the participant's story that need more discussion or clarification (Galletta, 2016, p. 51). The concluding segment is where the opportunity to ask more specific theoretical questions occurs, allowing the interviewer to blend the shared experiences with theoretical insights. It is argued by Galletta (2016, p. 51) that this segment can be used to enrich the interview, and it is about making sense together with the participant, exploring stories and addressing any confusions in the narrative. Galletta (2016, p. 51) further emphasises that it is very important to be attentive to any signs from the participant about

when the topic is fully explored. For this research, this is extremely important, as the topic can be sensitive, and the personal experiences of the participants might not always be positive.

Before conducting the interviews, I paid careful attention to the wording of the questions. Since some participants had limited English proficiency, I aimed to phrase questions in a clear and accessible way to avoid misunderstandings and ensure the validity of the responses. Although I did not conduct formal pilot interviews, each interview helped me improve the questions for the next one. While an interview guide was followed (Appendix 1), each conversation developed uniquely. Some participants answered questions in ways that overlapped with others, requiring me to gently guide the discussion without repetition. In some cases, my own background helped participants feel more relaxed, which led to more open and insightful sharing.

4.4. Research Ethics

This thesis was made following the ethical guidelines set by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2023) to verify the validity and reliability of the research. To avoid any academic misconduct, the guidelines were studied carefully. In addition, I followed the most updated instructions from the University of Lapland for academic writing.

This research topic was considered a sensitive topic, and as concluded in the research by Zopiatis et al. (2014) discussed previously in this thesis, there is a risk that responses from the participants might not be 100% truthful if they do not feel comfortable enough to truly share their experiences. To avoid any feeling of insecurity, the participant's anonymity was protected, and no personal identifiable data was collected. The only personal information collected was their nationality, as this was important information for studying cultural differences. The goal was that the individual participants would not be recognised when reading the final thesis. The interviews took place online, using Microsoft Teams. The audio will be transcribed and stored on a protected cloud drive. When transcribing the audio, the participants were coded to ensure that no personal information was saved.

Participation in the study was 100% voluntary. It was emphasised that even after the interview had taken place, the participants would have the opportunity to withdraw from the study. The participants were asked to sign a letter of consent before the interview began, where the objective of the study was explained, voluntarism to participate was mentioned, as well as instructions on how to contact me in case follow-up questions occur, or if one wants to withdraw from the study.

It was important to explain to the participants why I am doing this research and why I thought their point of view and honesty are integral to the validity of the results. Since I was hoping to get honest answers about the participants' experiences at their workplace, it was important to mention that I am in no way associated with any hospitality organisation in Finland. This way, I hoped to create a more trusting environment that encourages the participants to speak honestly.

Participants who were interviewed for this study were completely strangers to me, and as mentioned above, I am not associated with any hospitality organisation. Therefore, no conflict of interest occurred.

Plagiarism was avoided by following the most updated guidelines for academic writing created by the University of Lapland. In addition to this, any previous studies on the topic made by other students at the University of Lapland were read and credited, regardless of any opposing opinions or results they might have included.

4.5. Data collection and processing

This study employed semi-structured interviews with 7 foreign hospitality workers in Finland. The number of participants was determined based on phenomenological research standards, where depth of experience is prioritised over breadth (Smith, 2011, p. 10).

The participants for this study were found through my network, as well as social media. Because I was unable to find a sufficient number of participants, I eventually resorted to snowball sampling, since it proved to be the most effective recruitment method given the challenges in reaching foreign hospitality workers through conventional means. This technique involves asking participants (s) to recommend others in similar situations, creating a sort of referral chain (Noy, 2008, p. 330). Snowball sampling is often used in qualitative research when studying groups that may be less visible or harder to reach. As Noy (Noy, 2008, pp. 330–331) explains, this method does not just help access participants, but it also helps reveal the social networks that shape people's experiences. In a way, it becomes part of the research process itself. However, there are also limitations; since people tend to refer others who are like themselves, this can lead to a narrower number of participants (Noy, 2008, p. 331). This approach may thus introduce selection bias, as participants are more likely to recommend individuals with similar experiences. To address that, I also made efforts to recruit participants from different backgrounds to ensure a range of perspectives.

The final participants included two from Spain, and Indonesia, one alone from the Philippines, Poland, and Italy. The majority were working around the Capital region, few were working in Tampere. While I did not collect additional demographic information, I aimed for a variety of national backgrounds to bring in a range of perspectives on cultural adaptation.

The table below summarises the background information of the interview participants, using anonymised codes to protect their identities.

P1	Spain
P2	Spain
P3	Poland
P4	Italy
P5	Philippines
P6	Indonesia
P7	Indonesia

Table 1. Nationalities of the interview participants (codes used to ensure anonymity)

Although the number of participants was small, the participants came from both European and non-European countries, which helped highlight the diverse ways cultural differences are experienced in Finland. All of the participants were voluntary migrants, meaning that migrating to Finland was their voluntary choice and they either migrated because of a partner, a job opportunity or in hopes of better job and life opportunities.

My initial thought was to conduct the interviews in person, to fully connect with the participants. However, due to time restrictions, I resorted to virtual interviews, using MS Teams. This also allowed me to include participants from Tampere as well.

The interviews focused on participants'lived experiences of working in Finnish hospitality settings, with particular attention to cultural adaptation, communication, and inclusion. The questions were open-ended to allow for flexibility and to give space for the participants' own interpretations and reflections. This approach is in line with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), where the goal is to understand how people make sense of their experiences in their own words (Smith, 2011, pp. 57–60). Some questions were also guided by concepts from Berry's acculturation theory, as well as from Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions - for example, those related to integration, inclusion

and communication style. While the interview guide provided a structure, the actual conversations were shaped by the participants' responses and what they found meaningful to share with me.

The length of the interviews varied between 30min - 1 hour, based on how much the participants were willing to discuss. The ones with more experience in the industry were the most talkative, as they had many experiences to share, whereas those with less experience focused more on the experience of cultural differences between their own culture and the Finnish culture. The interviews were recorded on MS Teams, and the audio was detached from the video using the *Audacity* software. The initial transcription was made using MS Word, and the transcription was manually checked for errors. During this process, I made sure to remove any identifiable information, such as names or employers, to guarantee the anonymity of the research. The transcribing was done immediately after the interviews, which guaranteed that the interview was still fresh in my mind.

As recommended by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), I began by reading the transcription several times to fully immerse myself in the data Interpretative (Eatough & Smith, 2017, pp. 197–199). During this stage, I made initial notes focusing on descriptive comments, language use and early reflections. My notes were open and exploratory, aiming to capture anything that stood out in the participant's account.

From these initial notes, I began identifying emerging themes for each individual interview. This involved grouping similar observations and forming short phrases that capture the psychological essence of what the participant had said, as advised by Eatough and Smith (Eatough & Smith, 2017, pp. 200–201). The themes were not decided in advance but instead allowed to emerge naturally from what the participants said. After identifying themes for each interview, I looked across all the interviews to see what patterns or differences stood out. This meant moving from individual experience to shared ones, while still paying attention to each person's unique story, which is important in IPA (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 201).

Next, I grouped similar themes together and started linking them to the theories used in this study: Berry's acculturation strategies and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. This helped me understand how participants made sense of adapting to Finnish work culture.

Lastly, in the final stage of the analysis, I brought together the main themes into a written account that captured the overall story emerging from the data. This narrative was structured around the

shared experiences that appeared across interviews, such as challenges with language or adapting to workplace culture but also included the specific details and personal insights that made each participant's experience unique. This approach allowed me to show both the common patterns across the group and the individual differences that gave depth and meaning to their stories.

The next chapter presents the key themes that emerged from the interviews with foreign hospitality workers in Finland. These themes reflect the challenges, coping strategies and personal experiences that participants described as part of their adaptation to Finnish culture. The data strongly pointed to language and cultural differences as central issues shaping their daily work life and overall sense of belonging. The following chapter explores these themes in more detail through participants' own words and reflections.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Language Barriers and Inclusion

One of the most frequently emerging themes was the language barrier, as most, if not all. participants stated that the most difficult challenge they faced in Finland was the language. However, the difficulties they faced were not just about getting the job done, but they often touched something deeper, affecting how participants saw themselves and whether they felt they truly belonged at work.

A participant described their experience:

> *"– meetings are always held in Finnish – so you are just sitting there as the only non-Finn, on your phone not knowing anything". (P5)*

A participant from Poland noted how the sudden switch between English and Finnish contributed to a sense of exclusion:

> *"Oh it [language] is definitely the toughest part of working here. Like most of my colleagues speak English, but when things get busy, they switch to Finnish without realising it and sometimes it is very frustrating. Makes me feel excluded"(P3)*

These experiences highlight how the unintentional shift to Finnish, especially during high-pressure moments, can act as a subtle reminder of outsider status. While many participants acknowledged that their Finnish colleagues generally speak English, these situational language switches created moments of emotional distancing and disconnection from the workplace community.

One participant from Spain, working temporarily, shared that their short-term status reduced the pressure to learn Finnish:

> *"I'm only here for one season, so for me it's more about the experience of being in Finland. Of course I will learn some basic phrases, but honestly I don't see the point to learn more as I'm only working with tourists and other seasonal workers"(P1)*

This reflects how motivation to learn Finnish is shaped by both the perceived permanence of their stay and their sense of belonging.

Despite these challenges, many participants actively sought out ways to adapt. A participant from Italy described a positive and inclusive learning experience at work:

> *"When it's quiet my colleagues only speak Finnish to me now. They are so patient! I think they get a good laugh as well as my pronunciation is horrible.. When it's busy it's not possible, then we just speak English"(P6)*

These small, supportive interactions became crucial in bridging the cultural gap and reflect Berry's Acculturation Strategy of Integration, where individuals maintain their cultural identity while adapting to aspects of the host culture (Berry, 1997, p. 9). The absence of formal training meant that peer support played a vital role in building confidence and a sense of community.

For those who did feel pressure to learn Finnish, it was often tied less to job performance and more to a desire to belong—to connect socially, not just functionally. Overall, these stories show how language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a powerful gateway to inclusion—or exclusion—in Finnish workplaces.

Whereas none of the participants mentioned direct experiences of discrimination, several mentioned that, because of the lack of Finnish language skills, they are stuck with assignments that do not necessarily match their capability. For example:

> *"Back home I used to work in the busiest nightclubs, so it was hard that here I had to just clean glasses and do dishes because I didn't know the language" (P3)*

These types of experiences highlight the dual impact of language barriers: while they create feelings of exclusion, they also act as a barrier to professional growth. They also reveal a deeper issue: a disconnection between what foreign workers are capable of and the roles they are given, which often fail to match their prior experience. This mismatch between the skills and potential of a foreign worker and assigned roles suggests a need for greater organisational support in recognising and utilising a foreign worker's full potential.

5.2. Cultural Adaptation in the Workplace

Another key theme was how Finnish work culture, often perceived as reserved and rule-based, differs from the participants' own more socially and task-flexible environments. Some participants observed that the Finnish work culture was reserved and strictly bound by working hours, contrasting with more dynamic, multitasking environments in participants' home countries. This

adjustment required participants to adapt to both practical differences and the cultural values behind workplace behaviours.

A participant from the Philippines described feeling surprised by how strictly Finnish workers adhere to their working hours:

> *"The working culture is very different when like, for example, their shift is from 9:00 to 4:00. At 4:00 sharp they just throw up everything 4:15 out the door and that's it.. I don't know, but in my country, when you have a task that you started, even though your shift is almost done, you have to finish it before going out." (P5)*

This description points to a deeper cultural difference in how responsibility and flexibility are interpreted. In many collectivist cultures, staying late to finish a task reflects loyalty and team commitment, whereas in Finland, sticking to defined working hours is seen as part of maintaining personal boundaries and work-life balance.

Participants also commented on cultural differences in social interaction and communication. One participant from Italy shared how Finnish workplaces felt unusually quiet and reserved compared to their home country:

> *"It's weird, like in Italy we chat a lot with our co-workers, like even during our shifts. It's ok. Even in a hurry. But here it is different like more reserved and quiet"* (P4)

This reserved communication style was echoed by a participant from Poland, who described:

> *"What is different is that here when everyone is ready they just go home, like they just do their jobs and go home. First I thought wow this is weird, like back home we usually always hang out afterwards, get drinks and have fun. Well not always, but often."(P3)*

For many participants, the quiet nature of Finnish workplaces, especially during lunch breaks or transitions between shifts, felt isolating. One participant noted:

> *"In my country, everyone talks and laughs during work. Here, it feels so quiet – almost lonely. Also like during lunch time, I was used to like a big family lunch where we all sit down and eat together. Here it's just like you eat when you can and it's always just 1 person at a time." (P4)*

These reflections show how foreign workers have to adjust to Finnish workplace culture, especially in how people express emotions, manage time, and interact with others.

5.2.1. Adapting to Finnish norms

Despite these cultural differences, many participants shared that over time, they learned to adjust to Finnish norms. What initially felt cold or impersonal began to feel more structured and even comforting for some. One participant said:

> *"At first, the silence felt strange, but now I find it calming. It's different, but not bad". (P7)*

Another participant similarly shared:

> *"I found the silence very uncomfortable at first, but I got used to it and now I don't even notice it anymore" (P2)*

This shift highlights the participants' adaptability and openness to local norms, especially when those norms are experienced over time. These examples reflect Berry's (1997, p. 9) Acculturation Strategy of Integration, where individuals retain their cultural identity while adapting to aspects of the host culture.

Interestingly, some participants also noticed how their own behavior changed. A participant from Spain remarked:

> *"When I go back home now, I feel like I'm not as 'loud' as before. I think I've become more Finnish in that sense." (P2)*

This suggests that acculturation is not a one-directional process but involves a degree of internal change and identity negotiation. As exposure to Finnish norms increased, some participants began to integrate those norms into their own behavior, even in ways that surprised them

5.2.2. Work conditions and fairness

Cultural adaptation was also influenced by broader workplace expectations and structural issues in the hospitality industry. Many participants felt that Finnish coworkers were more likely to refuse requests for overtime, whereas foreign workers often felt pressured to say yes. A participant from Indonesia shared:

"I've noticed that it is rarely a Finnish worker who agrees to stay overtime, but they do always ask everyone. I usually stay because I need the money, and I don't want to leave my colleagues alone in a rush"(P7)

Another participant noted:

"Maybe they know we don't have that much going on after work [laughter]so they just assume it's ok for us to stay. I mean I really don't mind, but yes I do think that sometimes it is discrimination in a way" (P6)

One participant described being frequently called in on their rest days due to understaffing:

"For example, I had a long day for three days and then on my rest day, very early in the morning, my boss called and said, hey, can you come to work because somebody is sick? Like, Oh no. I couldn't say no because like it's work and I have a daughter, so I have to work."(P5)

These quotes reflect an industry culture where flexibility and availability are highly valued, but not equally distributed. Foreign workers, especially those with financial pressures or family obligations, may feel they cannot say no, even when they want to.

One participant pointed to a deeper concern, describing how they were not compensated for work on rest days:

"- if I remember in the TES, if you have to work on an X day, it means it is more pay or something like that, or they have to compensate something. Does it happen? No. A lot of companies are bending that law, to be honest.- I went to PAM and then PAM just said ok we will talk to them and that's it. I never heard of them anymore" (P5)

Clause 19 in the Collective Agreement for the Hotel, Restaurant, and Leisure Industry does clearly state, that: "The pay for work done on an X day and a day of annual leave shall be the normal pay plus 50%." (Finnish Hospitality Association & Service Union United, 2023, p. 49). This participant's story suggests that in practice, these regulations are not always enforced.

Unfortunately, I was not surprised to hear this, as it reminded me of my own experiences when I was working in the industry: it was common to get called in during my days off from work due to understaffing, though I never encountered any issues with receiving proper and legal compensation.

This raises an important question: Are foreign workers adequately informed about their rights and the appropriate steps to take in such situations? It should be noted, however, that this was the experience of 1 worker, and similar problems with the salary were not mentioned by others.

5.3. Workplace Relationships and Inclusion

Another key theme that emerged was the role of workplace relationships in shaping participants' experience of inclusion. While some participants described moments of social distance, many also shared positive, supportive interactions with colleagues and supervisors.

As mentioned earlier, one participant recalled how their colleagues made an effort to include them socially after work:

> *"Sometimes after work, we all go for drinks, and even though I'm not fluent in Finnish, they make sure I feel included in the conversation*." (P4)

This simple gesture illustrates how inclusion is not always about shared language, but about intentional efforts to make someone feel seen and involved.

In contrast, another participant reflected on the absence of informal bonding:

> *"What is different is that here when everyone is ready they just go home... back home we usually always hang out afterwards, get drinks and have fun."(P3)*

This contrast highlights how social inclusion is experienced differently depending on the local workplace culture and the willingness of individuals to bridge cultural divides.

Participants also spoke about the role of management in fostering a sense of belonging. One participant from Spain shared:

"*My boss is really nice. She always checks if I need help, even though we sometimes struggle with the language. She is also very understanding and patient with me, which is really nice."(P7)*

This participant's statement reflects Finland's low power distance index, where relationships between supervisors and employees are often characterised by equality and mutual respect (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 61). In contrast to high power distance cultures, such as those in Indonesia

or the Philippines, this informality may initially feel surprising but ultimately creates space for trust and openness.

At the same time, Finland's high Uncertainty Avoidance means that while workplace interactions may appear casual, they are still governed by clear expectations. This combination of low power distance and high need for structure can be both helpful and confusing for foreign workers. For example, it supports easy communication with supervisors, but it can also leave room for misunderstanding if those expectations are not explicitly explained.

Berry's (1997, p. 9) framework would interpret limited social engagement from Finnish coworkers as something that may risk leading to separation or even marginalisation, especially if mutual cultural exchange is absent. For workers from collectivist cultures, this reserve may be perceived as disinterest or exclusion (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 94). However, the diversity of experiences shared by participants also shows that inclusion can and does happen, particularly in environments where empathy and effort are present

I was not surprised that the theme of compensation was discussed in nearly all interviews. This aligns with existing research highlighting low pay in the hospitality industry (SOURCE), and participants echoed this concerned through varying perspectives depending on their background and time spent in Finland. Some participants did not want to complain about the level of salaries in Finland, as they acknowledged that it was much higher than what they would earn back home. A participant from Indonesia shared:

> *"Finnish people like to complain a lot especially about money and pay. I mean it's not great but it's more that I would get from home so I'm happy."* (P6)

This reflects how relative economic conditions influence perceptions of fairness. For some, the chance to earn more than they would in their home countries was reason enough to feel content with the wages, even if the local standard considered them low.

However, frustration was more common among those who had been in Finland longer or taken on more responsibilities. One participant stated:

> *"- . So I told her, like, if you go any lower than 2900, I'm not gonna take it. Just work as a normal worker, no responsibilities. So like they're tightening their belts and at the same time tightening ours. (P5)*

Another worker pointed out how the rising cost of living made the issue even more frustrating:

> *"Living in Finland is so expensive, so yeah the salaries in this industry are bad. I was given a promotion but the salary raise was ridiculous.. Like they don't respect us, honestly". (P5)*

These quotes reflect a growing sense of being undervalued, especially among experienced workers who take on more duties without appropriate compensation. The frustration was not just about the pay but about what that pay symbolized: lack of recognition, respect, and fairness.

These frustrations reflect real problems in the hospitality industry in Finland, and to tackle that, a new collective agreement between the Finnish Hospitality Association (MaRa) and Service Union United (Palvelualojen ammattiliitto PAM) has been established to address wage concerns (PAM, 2025). According to the new agreement, salaries for employees and supervisors in the sector will rise by 7,8% over a 3 year period (PAM, 2025). However, according to Statistics Finland (Tilastokeskus), the cost of living in March 2025 was still very high, even though the inflation had slowed down to 0,5% (Tilastokeskus, 2025). The prices of everyday items have gone up over time, and many basic expenses remain expensive. For people working in low-paid jobs, it can understandably be hard to keep up with these costs.

5.4. Future Prospects in Finland and the Industry

When asked about the future in Finland or in hospitality industry, participants expressed significant uncertainty. None of the participants were 100% sure they would stay in Finland, and while none of the participants mentioned that they were going back home, several mentioned the possibility of moving to another EU country:

> *"I'm planning to move to the Netherlands or somewhere in Germany. Because like, as far as I can see at the moment, like, Finland is kind of sinking on its legs.-. No one wants to go out and eat in a restaurant now, especially in the evening. So I'm planning to move either Netherlands or Germany." (P5)*

This suggests that many foreign workers are not just job-hopping, but they are actively seeking more stable futures in countries perceived as more supportive or economically viable. Some also mentioned that the political situation in Finland made them feel uncertain about staying:

> *"I mean it's not looking so good for us foreigners in Finland right now… It's intense I don't know if I want to see what happens. So yeah maybe after the season I will start to look elsewhere, maybe Norway" (P6)*

This remark reflects more than economic concerns, as it touches on a deeper emotional disconnect from Finnish society.

While some mentioned that they would stay working in the industry, just not in Finland, the majority stated that they do not see themselves working in the industry in the future. A participant from Philippines said:

> *"I have a kid and we want to grow our family. It's just not possible working like this.. always different schedules and bad money"(P5)*

Another added:

> *"No. It's fun now but I don't want to do this much longer.. It would have to be a very special place with high salary for me to stay working in this"(P1)*

This highlights how lifestyle sustainability plays a key role in career planning and cultural integration, especially for those with families.

I was curious and asked the participants what would make them stay in the industry, and the unanimous reply was the salary and better working conditions. Others mentioned that the unpredictability of the industry would need to change to avoid constant understaffing and uncertainty. Reflecting on these findings, I resonated with their opinions and frustrations, as I too experienced similar challenges during my years in the industry. These findings emphasise that improving retention among foreign hospitality workers is not just about better salary, it also requires making the industry more humane, predictable and inclusive.

6. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses how the findings relate to Berry's acculturation strategies and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. I have also looked closely at earlier research, particularly studies that explore how people make sense of their experiences, navigate cultural norms, and connect with others, to better understand the experiences of foreign hospitality workers in Finland. Since this study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the focus is on how participants make sense of their world. That means language, emotion, and interpretation are central, not just what people said, but how they felt about it, and how they understood their place within it.

One of the clearest patterns that emerged was how language impacted workers—not only in completing tasks, but in shaping their emotional experience of inclusion. While most participants were able to work in English, moments where Finnish dominated meetings or casual conversations led to feelings of exclusion and disconnection. These findings align with Devine et al. (2007, p. 344), who note that surface-level communication is not enough to create belonging. Language carries emotion and signals identity.

Berry's concept of acculturative stress (1997, p. 9) helps explain how something as seemingly simple as a language switch can cause feelings of "otherness." Henderson (2005, pp. 70, 74–75) also reminds us that even shared languages like English can still carry different meanings depending on cultural context. What feels direct in one setting might feel rude in another. Silence, too, holds different weight depending on background. These subtle moments of what is said, how it is said, and what is not said shaped how included participants felt, both socially and professionally.

Wilmot et al. (2024, p. 62) describe language as a kind of social filter; those who speak it fluently are more likely to be seen as "ideal workers." In Finland's high Uncertainty Avoidance culture (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 191, 205–206)Clear communication and predictability are highly valued. So when language gaps emerge, especially during busy times, they are often dealt with by reverting to Finnish, even if it unintentionally excludes someone.

In addition to language, many participants described the need to adapt to Finnish work culture. What some initially saw as quiet or cold culture, others eventually came to see as calm and efficient.

This was especially true for participants from countries like Spain, Italy, or the Philippines, where workplace communication tends to be more expressive and emotionally open. Hofstede's (2010, pp. 95, 114) Individualism dimension helps explain some of this difference: in Finland, people value independence and emotional control, whereas collectivist cultures often value relational warmth and group cohesion.

Henderson (2005, p. 74) argues that misinterpretations of behaviour, like silence, lack of eye contact, or bluntness, are common in intercultural settings and can lead to feelings of rejection or misunderstanding. In this study, some participants interpreted the quietness of Finnish workplaces as emotional distance. But over time, many learned to reinterpret these silences, finding them less threatening and more neutral or even comforting.

Another point of tension was how authority and hierarchy were understood. Participants from Indonesia and the Philippines expressed confusion over the informality of Finnish supervisors. In their cultures, leadership is more hierarchical and visibly authoritative. Hofstede's Power Distance index (2010, p. 61) supports this difference: Finland's low ranking suggests that managers are expected to be approachable, while high power distance cultures view formality as a sign of respect. These differences led to moments of uncertainty, as participants did not always know where boundaries were or how much initiative they were expected to take.

Cultural expectations around social interaction and work roles also varied noticeably between participants. Those from more collectivist cultures, such as the Philippines or Indonesia (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 32) often valued social bonding at work and expected clearer leadership from supervisors. For them, the Finnish style of quiet independence and informal hierarchy sometimes felt confusing or even isolating. his aligns with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, where both the Philippines and Indonesia are considered high-context, hierarchical societies (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 61, 95). Meanwhile, participants from more individualistic or Western European backgrounds, such as Italy or Spain (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 95), also noticed these differences, but tended to adjust more quickly or interpret them as just a cultural quirk rather than a barrier. These variations highlight that the same workplace can be experienced very differently depending on one's cultural lens.

These cross-cultural mismatches did not always cause conflict, but they did create emotional friction. Berry (1997, p. 11) notes that acculturation requires not just the willingness of migrants

to adapt, but also an openness from the host culture to accommodate and explain. Without that two-way effort, integration becomes harder.

What I found especially interesting were the ways participants described their own transformation over time. Some said they had become quieter, less animated, or more structured and quiet. One participant said they felt "more Finnish" when they visited home. This suggests that acculturation is not a simple or one-time adjustment, but it is a gradual shift in how people relate to their environment and even to themselves. Most participants seemed to be aiming for integration, so trying to hold on to parts of their own cultural identity while also adapting to Finnish norms. But in a few cases, especially among those who had been in Finland longer, there were signs of something closer to assimilation. Some described feeling that they had slowly changed how they spoke, behaved, or even expressed emotion to better fit in.

It was also clear that these challenges were not experienced in the same way by everyone: for example, seasonal workers generally did not feel the same pressure to integrate, but many were more focused on making the most of their time in Finland. On the other hand, participants who had been working in Finland for many years (particularly those from Indonesia and Poland) seemed to be more frustrated. For them, ongoing language barriers, unclear expectations, and limited chances for advancement in their workplace felt more discouraging. These differences suggest that how people experience acculturation is tied to their personal goals, how long they intend to stay, and where they're coming from, both culturally and situationally (Berry, 1997, p. 9).

Relationships in the workplace seem to have made a big difference in how participants navigated these changes; when colleagues or supervisors made small efforts, like inviting someone to drinks, checking in during a shift, it helped participants feel welcome. These kinds of gestures highlight the importance of team dynamics in promoting well-being, as noted by Lefrid et al. (2022, p. 7) and Wilmot et al. (2024, pp. 62, 65). Without them, even a well-paid or secure job can feel isolating.

At the same time, some participants described frustrations with working conditions, particularly around pay, scheduling, and recognition. Several felt that their responsibilities were not reflected in their compensation. Others talked about being called in on rest days or staying late without extra pay. While some accepted this as "part of the job," others questioned whether foreign workers were being taken advantage of. This frustration wasn't just about money. It was about feeling respected. As Kong et al. (2018, pp. 2183–2185) note, job satisfaction in hospitality is not only linked to pay,

but it is also tied to interpersonal recognition and fair treatment. This reflects Maslow's view that once basic needs are met, people seek belonging, respect, and meaning in their work (Koltko-Rivera, 2006, p. 303).

Many participants were not sure if they would stay in Finland long-term. Some were considering moving to countries like Germany or the Netherlands. Others mentioned political changes and a growing sense that foreigners were no longer welcome. This highlights the broader emotional and social dimensions of integration: it is not enough to be employed; people also need to feel that they belong.

Berry (1997, p. 73) emphasises that integration is a two-way process. Migrants cannot carry all the responsibility for adapting, and employers, institutions, and society also need to create space for cultural exchange. Furthermore, as Joppe (2012, p. 669) points out, this support needs to go beyond hiring, and it must continue throughout the entire employment journey if foreign workers are to truly feel included, valued, and motivated to stay.

7. CONCLUSION

The research in this thesis looked at how foreign hospitality workers in Finland navigate cultural adaptation, workplace inclusion, and professional growth. By focusing on the participants' personal stories and using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), I aimed to create space for their voices while also connecting their experiences to broader cultural ideas.

This thesis set out to explore how cultural differences influence the acculturation and adaptation of foreign hospitality workers in Finland. Based on the interviews, it became clear that cultural differences, and particularly language, communication styles, and workplace hierarchy, have a major impact on how participants experienced their daily work life. The participants were doing their best to integrate into Finnish society, trying to find a balance between their own cultural identity and the expectations of Finnish work culture.

Nevertheless, the process was not always easy for them. Whole some participants felt welcomed and supported, others encountered barriers that left them feeling excluded or uncertain about their place. Berry's (1997) and Hofstede's (2010) frameworks helped make sense of these varied experiences, showing that integration is not just a matter of personal effort, but it also relies on the surrounding environment, society, and the support systems available.

One of the strongest findings from the interviews was the role of language, and how much it affected the workers' everyday experience at work, not just for practical things such as tasks or instructions, but emotionally. Many participants stated that they could manage fine in English when it came to their job duties, but things got complicated when the conversation shifted to Finnish, especially in casual chats or team meetings. That was when people started to feel left out. It was not so much that they could not understand what was going on; it was more the feeling of not being included. A few even mentioned that it made them question whether they really belonged there or not.

I began to notice that cultural expectations, such as how you are meant to speak with your manager, how much small talk is considered normal, or even who gets the final say, had a big influence on how people made sense of their work environment. At first, many of these cultural differences seemed quite subtle. However, as I engaged more deeply with the participants' experiences, it

became evident that these seemingly minor details, such as how directly people communicate, who is expected to speak up, or how much initiative one is meant to take, had a significant cumulative effect. What appeared small at first often carried real weight in shaping how participants understood and navigated their work environments.

Hofstede's framework helped me make sense of it, especially the parts about individualism and power distance. It explained why someone coming from a more hierarchical culture might feel unsure in a Finnish workplace, where everything is pretty "flat" and informal. You are sort of just expected to take initiative, make decisions on your own, and figure things out as you go. For some, that was freeing; however, for others, it was confusing. A few mentioned they were not always sure when it was okay to ask questions or offer feedback, especially when their supervisor acted more like a peer than a boss. That kind of openness was not something they were used to, and it took some getting used to. It took a while to adjust, and not everyone felt they had figured it out completely. Still, many adjusted over time, and some even said they started adopting Finnish ways of working and interacting.

Berry's ideas about acculturation also came up again and again in how people talked about their adaptation. Most were trying to integrate, holding on to parts of their own culture while also learning to live within Finnish norms, but that balance was not always easy. When people felt unsupported or left out, their experiences leaned more toward separation or even marginalisation.

What stood out as well were the differences depending on people's backgrounds and how long they had been in Finland: Short-term or seasonal workers usually were not too concerned with full integration, as they were in Finland for only a short time. However, those who had been here longer were more focused on things such as career development, fair treatment, and feeling included. When these were missing, especially alongside tough work conditions such as low pay and unstable schedules, the feelings of frustration and isolation grew stronger.

Most participants were not planning to go back home right away, but not many saw Finland as a long-term home either. A few talked about moving to other European countries where they hoped things might feel more open or stable. What became clear is that having a job is not enough; true

integration also depends on support systems, cultural openness, and spaces where people feel like they actually belong.

Overall, this study adds to the growing research on intercultural dynamics at work, especially in hospitality. It highlights the ways in which foreign workers make sense of their place within Finnish society, along with the emotional complexities that often accompany that process. Perhaps more importantly, the findings point to a broader need for workplaces and the structures that support them. to move beyond simply employing migrant workers. Integration requires more than access to a job; it depends on creating environments where individuals feel recognised, valued, and allowed to develop, rather than merely coping or enduring.

7.1. Limitations of the study

While I believe that this study can offer valuable insight into the lived experiences of foreign hospitality workers in Finland, it is important to acknowledge the limitations that may affect the generalizability and interpretation of the findings.

Firstly, the study is rooted in a qualitative research paradigm and more specifically interpretive phenomenology, aiming to understand personal experiences rather than to produce a large number of more generalised data (Gill, 2014, p. 120; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1057). This means that data collected through interviews (more specifically semi-structured interviews) are subjective and reflective of the interviewer's perspectives, and are shaped by the participants' background, emotions and the context of the interview (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1057). While the approach used in this research allows for a rich, nuanced understanding, it also means that results cannot be applied to all foreign workers in the Finnish hospitality industry (Kirillova, 2018, p. 3328). Each participant's experiences are unique, and thus the findings presented should be interpreted within the context of the specific individuals interviewed (Gill, 2014, p. 127; Kirillova, 2018, p. 3328).

Secondly, the sample size in this study is relatively small, although consistent with the principles of IPA, prioritising depth over quantity (Gill, 2014, p. 125; Smith, 2011, p. 9). However, it should be acknowledged that this small sample size presents limitations in terms of diversity and representation, as the sample may not fully capture the range of experiences among foreign workers, especially when considering differences in culture, gender, age and how long they have been living in Finland (Gill, 2014, p. 128). It is very possible that some foreign workers may experience additional challenges that were not surfaced in this study.

Language may also have been a limiting factor in this study, as all of the interviews were conducted in English, which was neither my, nor any of the participants' native language. Although efforts were made to keep the interview questions as simple as possible, it is possible that participants were not able to truly express their experiences in a foreign language. This concern is supported by Karhunen et al. (2018, p. 994), as they explain how language is shaped by interaction and context, so it can be hard for participants to fully express complex experiences in a second language.

Additionally, language is not always just about words, but often it is about expressions and non-verbal cues that are culture-specific, meaning that I, as a Finnish interviewer, may have either misinterpreted or missed something. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, even when we speak the same language, we may still understand things differently because of our cultural background and how we interpret communication (Henderson, 2005, pp. 96–70). All of this shows a common challenge in cross-cultural research: people might say one thing but mean another thing. While I attempted to keep the interviews clear and respectful, it is important to acknowledge that language and cultural differences may have affected both what the participants said and how I understood it.

Furthermore, research bias must be acknowledged here. As someone with a personal experience in the Finnish hospitality industry and a multicultural background, my interpretations are inevitably influenced by my own positionality. While my experiences could have enriched the analysis by providing empathy and contextual understanding, they might also introduce unintentional bias during the interpretation of the data. This is a common consideration in interpretive phenomenology, where the researchers' subjectivity is not bracketed out, but acknowledged as a valuable lens through which meaning is interpreted (Gill, 2014, p. 123). Additionally, qualitative research in hospitality often involves challenges related to research presence and bias, such as the influence of the researcher's role on participants' responses (Arendt et al., 2012, p. 827).

Time constraints also posed a limitation, as the data collection was conducted under a very restricted timetable. This restricted the opportunity to a prolonged search for participants from varied backgrounds, and I possibly would have been able to avoid snowball sampling, resulting in a more diverse sample. Additionally, the sample size could have been larger.

Lastly, it is important to mention that my inexperience as an interviewer posed a limitation, especially with a challenging method as interpretive phenomenology. Additionally, conducting long, deep interviews was challenging to a novice interviewee like myself, however, I believe that I managed to capture the experiences of even just a few foreign workers in the Finnish hospitality industry.

7.2. Suggestions for further studies

This study brought up several interesting themes that I would suggest benefit from more research. One quite obvious approach would be to conduct a similar study on a larger number of participants with more diverse backgrounds. Additionally, while this study focused on voluntary migrants working in the hospitality industry, future research could benefit from including participants with different migration paths as well, such as international students or asylum seekers. This would allow for a deeper understanding of how factors such as migration motivation, previous international experience or language proficiency shape adaptation and integration in the Finnish context. Moreover, different service sectors could be studied as well.

Additionally, future studies could include the perspectives of the Finnish workers as well to better understand how they perceive and navigate cross-cultural interaction in the workplace. Such research could explore how Finnish employees experience multicultural teams, if they receive any training or support in cross-cultural communication, and how prepared they feel to work alongside people with different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, it would be beneficial to study the perspectives of supervisors and managers, who play a central role in shaping workplace dynamics. Research could focus on whether they feel adequately equipped to manage multicultural teams, what kinds of support or training they receive, and how they handle challenges related to language, communication, or cultural misunderstandings. Including the managerial perspective could reveal structural or organisational factors that influence how well integration succeeds in practice.

Finally, the role of language itself deserves deeper investigation. This study confirmed that language is much more than a tool for verbal communication; it affects emotional well-being, social inclusion, and professional development. Future research could examine how language practices, expectations, and policies shape experiences of belonging in the workplace.

Overall, these suggested themes for future research would help to create a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics that shape multicultural work environments and practices aimed at improving workplace integration for everyone involved.

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APPENDIX 1: Interview questions

1. **Could you describe your background and what brought you to Finland to work in the hospitality industry?**
2. **What was your first impression of Finland's work culture when you started working in the hospitality industry?**
3. **How have you found adapting to Finnish work culture? Have you noticed any significant differences between work cultures in Finland and your home country?**
4. **Can you tell me about any challenges you've faced when working with Finnish colleagues or management?**
5. **How do you balance maintaining aspects of your own culture while adapting to Finnish norms in the workplace?**
6. **How do language barriers affect your day-to-day work, if at all? How do you cope with them?**
7. **What kind of support (if any) have you received from your employer or colleagues to help you adjust to working in Finland?**
8. **Have you experienced any training related to Finnish culture or communication styles at your workplace? How useful was it?**
9. **Have you ever felt isolated or excluded at work due to cultural differences? If so, how did you handle it?**
10. **What are some strategies that have helped you cope with the challenges of working in a new cultural environment?**
11. **Looking forward, do you feel more integrated into the Finnish work culture now compared to when you started? Why or why not?**
11. **What changes or improvements do you think could be made in the hospitality industry in Finland, to better support foreign workers like yourself?**

APPENDIX 2: Interview consent form

Dear Participant,

My name is Sara Calderon Nurmi, I am a master's student at the University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland under the supervision of Senior Lecturer Minni Haanpää (mhaanpaa@ulapland.fi, Tel. +358 40 484 4192). You are invited to participate in my master thesis study entitled *Understanding Acculturation and Cultural Dimensions: A Phenomenological Study of Foreign Hospitality Workers in Finland*. The study aims to explore how foreign workers in Finland's hospitality industry experience and adapt to Finnish work culture, aiming to provide insights that can support better integration and work satisfaction. The result of the study will be published as part of my master's thesis. The thesis is conducted as part of the Master's Degree Programme in Tourism, Culture and International Management (TourCIM).

By signing this letter, you give consent to use the interview material confidentially and exclusively for research purposes. The research follows the principles for responsible conduct of research dictated by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research. The data will be handled anonymously. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw your permission even after signing this document, by informing the below mentioned contact person.

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor, if you would need further information regarding the study and the use of the research data.

Sincerely,

Sara Calderon Nurmi

TourCIM Master student

phone

email

I give consent to use the interview as data for the purpose mentioned above.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____

Print Name

APPENDIX 3: Interview invitation letter

Dear xx,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research! As part of my study on the experiences of foreign workers in the hospitality industry in Finland, your insights are incredibly valuable. Your contribution will help provide a clearer understanding of the challenges and successes faced by foreign workers and may guide improvements for better integration and job satisfaction.

What to Expect:

- **Interview Format:** A 30–60-minute interview conducted online (via Teams) in English.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time, even after the interview has started.
- **Confidentiality:** All information shared will be kept anonymous, and your responses will be treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality.

Interviews will be held during November - December 2024 and can be scheduled during the week or weekend. Please select a time that works best for you through this link. If none of the available times are suitable, feel free to contact me, and I will do my best to accommodate you.